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Puerto Rican Migration: Culture & Family

April 23, 2006

Elizabeth R. Pfoh

The Puerto Rican migration is a unique experience since Puerto Ricans are citizens of the United States. The special relationship that is shared is the cause of specific consequences to the migration of Puerto Ricans to and from New York. Puerto Ricans have moved freely between New York and Puerto Rico. While, there can be seen a divergent and successful middle class population, as of 1990, many Puerto Ricans living both in the mainland and in Puerto Rico lived below the poverty level. The focus of this paper is to explore whether or not migration's impact of family ties and education has contributed to the rampant poverty among Puerto Ricans.

Puerto Rico became a colony of the United States in 1898. Puerto Rico was transferred from Spain to the United States as a result of the Spanish to American War. Puerto Ricans had fought for their independence from Spain in 1868¹, even through the independence movement lost, Puerto Ricans had developed their own culture by the time their country was transferred to the United States. The United States was ignorant of the Puerto Rican culture; "This [the Spanish American War] is not a war of devastation, but one to give to all within control of its military and naval forces the advantages and blessings of enlightened civilization."² This ignorance of the Puerto Rican culture could first be seen with the imposition of English into the education system. The language policy of the commissioner of education "dictated the use of English as the language of instruction in all school classes, including non to language subjects such as arithmetic."³ English became the official language of the government and all governmental activities had to be conducted in a language most Puerto Ricans did not understand. "The Official Languages Act mandated that 'the English language and the Spanish language shall be

¹ Morris, N. *Puerto Rico: Culture, politics and identity*. Westport & London: Praeger, 1995

² Morris, Puerto Rico, 22

³ Morris, Puerto Rico, 30.

used indiscriminately.”⁴ This change of language made sense to the United States since all of the American appointments to Puerto Rico spoke English; it did not matter that Puerto Ricans spoke Spanish, that was being changed already through the school system. It was not until 1952 that Puerto Rico was able to ratify its own constitution and became a “Free Associated State” of the United States, or incorrectly used in the English language a “Commonwealth.”⁵ This complicated relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico exists throughout the Twentieth century and sets the stage for study of one of the most interesting migrations of the late Twentieth century.

Puerto Rico: Causes & Effects of Migration

Migration as a safety valve

Puerto Rico’s population grew by leaps and bounds in the early part of the nineteenth century. This increase in population was due to better healthcare, which lowered the rate of infant mortality and raised life expectancy. This led to overpopulation on the small island. Emigration was seen as a temporary and immediate fix for the situation. Muñoz Marín in 1946 thought that “it is necessary to resort to emigration as a measure for the immediate relief to the problem posed by our surplus population, while we seek permanent solutions in the long run.”⁶ In 1947, Puerto Rico’s legislature approved Public Law 25, creating the Employment and Migration Bureau.⁷ This law stated, “The Government of Puerto Rico does not stimulate or discourage the migration of Puerto Rican workers to the United States or any other foreign country; but

⁴ Morris, Puerto Rico, 29

⁵ Morris Puerto Rico: 49

⁶ Duany, J. 2002. *Puerto Rican Nation on the Move: Identities on the Island and in the United States*. Chapel Hill & London : The University of North Carolina Press, 2002.170

⁷ Duany, Puerto Rico, 171

it deems its duty to duly orient [them] regarding the occupational opportunities and adjustment problems in ethnologically strange settings.⁸ The government set up the Migration Division which was to help advocate for Puerto Ricans rights in New York and on the mainland in general. The Migration Division was powerful though the 1950s; in the 1960s it eventually lost power and became tangled up in bureaucracy. Its ability to help migrants was limited by competing visions and rivalry with other community groups.⁹

Operation Bootstrap

In 1947 Operation Bootstrap was started in Puerto Rico. This was a program allowing “exemption from insular taxes for any corporation that build a plant in a new industry, expanded approved existing industry or constructed a new hotel.”¹⁰ This program was designed to bring more U.S. companies to Puerto Rico. By bringing more companies to the island, it was hoped that more jobs would be created. With more jobs the people of Puerto Rico could gain higher incomes and be assured of more regular employment then seen in their agricultural economy.¹¹ More importantly to the U.S. government, this would also benefit U.S. companies because they would receive seven years of tax exemptions and cheap labor.¹² This tax exemption would make large American corporations that built in Puerto Rico a lot of money.

⁸ Duany, Puerto Rico, 171

⁹ Duany, Puerto Rico, 169

¹⁰ Torre, C.A., Vecchini, H.R., & Burgos, W, eds. *The Commuter Nation: perspectives on Puerto Rican migration*. Puerto Rico: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1994. 191

¹¹ Torre, Commuter Nation. 153

¹² Morales, J. [Puerto Rican Poverty And Migration: We just had to try elsewhere.](#) New York : Praeger, 1986. 33

Before Operation Bootstrap was enacted, Puerto Rico was mainly an agricultural island. In “1948, agriculture had been responsible for 17.4% GNP and manufacturing had been responsible for 15.5%.”¹³ Agriculture slowly declined while manufacturing rose as proportions of the GNP: in 1960, 9.8% was agriculture vs. 21.9% was manufacturing; in 1970 it was 3.4% agriculture vs. 25.4% manufacturing; and in 1989 it was 2.1% agriculture vs. 55% manufacturing.¹⁴ This decline of agriculture and rise of manufacturing was a direct result of Project Bootstrap. With the influx of new companies land was taken from farmers and given to corporations to build the manufacturing facilities that they needed. However, employment did not rise as expected. There was a “sharp decrease in employment from a peak of 596,000 jobs in 1950 to its low level of 542,000 jobs in 1960.”¹⁵ Most of the lost jobs were in the agricultural employment.¹⁶ Women lost jobs doing needlework with the application of the U.S. minimum wage to Puerto Rico. Before the application, women made extra money working in their homes on homespun needlework; the minimum wage made it too expensive to pay women for needlework.¹⁷ This made needed extra income unavailable to families and they had to look for other ways to make money.

Young men looked to the city for employment. They tried to earn a living in urban manufacturing since they were unable to make a living in agriculture the way their fathers did. The Puerto Rican government kept giving money to manufacturing firms. In 1960, “firms promoted by the government [made up] 54% of manufacturing net

¹³ Torre, Commuter Nation 153

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Morales, Puerto Rican Poverty, 76

¹⁶ Morales, Puerto Rican Poverty 76

¹⁷ Torre, Commuter Nation, 173

income.”¹⁸ This number was up to 93 to 94% of manufacturing net income in 1980.¹⁹ However, the firms subsidized by the government were not usually Puerto Rican firms. Most of the manufacturing firms were actually U.S. companies; “80% of the firms subsidized by the Puerto Rican government have been subsidiaries of U.S. corporations which use Puerto Rico as little more than a production point.”²⁰ This meant the majority of the profits that were off of Puerto Rican land and workers went to the United States. There were not enough jobs from manufacturing to support the displaced workers who were farmers.²¹ Unemployment increased from 1950 to 1980. In 1950 the unemployment rate was 12.9%. it was 13.3% in 1960, 10.3% in 1970 and 17% in 1980.²² In order to find employment Puerto Ricans entered the migratory flow.

Migration first started with farmers and farmers’ sons migrating from rural towns to big cities in Puerto Rico. “Puerto Rico’s rural areas sent a disproportionate number of migrants to the United States and, to a lesser extent, the San Juan metropolitan areas during the 1940’s and 1950’s.”²³ In 1940, 67% of Puerto Rico’s population lived in rural areas and the per capita income was \$125 per person.²⁴ When there were not enough jobs in the cities, Puerto Ricans migrated to the United States; “the family was uprooted twice. First there was a movement from Puerto Rican rural towns to the slums in Puerto Rican cities. Unable to secure employment, Puerto Ricans moved out of the slums to New

¹⁸ Torre, *Commuter Nation*, 155

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Torre, *Commuter Nation*, 157 to 158

²¹ Torre, *Commuter Nation*, 156

²² Torre, *Commuter Nation*, 157

²³ Duany, J. “Mobile livelihoods: the sociocultural practices of circular migrants between Puerto Rico and the United States.” *Internacional Migration Review* 36 (2002): 355.

²⁴ Friedlander, S.L. *Labor Migration and Economic Growth: A case study of Puerto Rico*. Cambridge, Mass: M.I.T.Press, 1965. 45

York.”²⁵ The shortage of jobs was also an effect of the population boom Puerto Rico experience in the early Twentieth century. Due to better food and healthcare there was “a sharp reduction in the death rate, [which] combined with one of the world’s highest birthrates, brought rapid population growth.”²⁶ Unfortunately, younger people migrated more often than older people. “Between 1940 and 1960 there was a decline of 6.2% of the population in the age bracket 15 to 44.”²⁷ This decline was due to out migration of Puerto Rican young. This left Puerto Rico without the young bodies and minds a growing population needs.

There was a large migration between New York and Puerto Rico. Migration was easy between the 2 locations. There was no need for visas between the two places and airplanes made the trip fast and inexpensive. This allowed people to travel without being counted. Some people only stayed in the United States for less than 6 months and some moved there permanently. For example, migrants moved to different parts of the United States for jobs in farming, driving trucks, the service industry and factories. From 1950 to 1960, 25% of Puerto Rican’s labor force migrated to the United States.²⁸ Puerto Ricans who were born in the United States also traveled to and lived in Puerto Rico. It is known approximately that the net out-migration in 1950 was 450,000; 137,000 people in 1960, 57,000 in 1970 and 88,000 in 1980.²⁹ The net out-migration was affected by the ability of migrants to get jobs in New York City and other places.

Part of Operation Bootstrap was promoting migration to help economic growth. It was thought that fewer people would be out of employment if they migrated out of the

²⁵ Morales, Puerto Rican Poverty 134

²⁶ Friedlander, Labor Migration, 6

²⁷ Friedlander, Labor Migration, 59

²⁸ Torre, Commuter Nation, 171

²⁹ Torre, Commuter Nation, 154

island; the “timing and magnitude of emigration will determine how much capital is needed to overcome the stagnation and conversely the size and timing of capital inflow will determine how much emigration is needed to reach a stage of cumulative economic growth.”³⁰ Thus, migration and money would help jumpstart Puerto Rico’s economy. Migration hypothesis the unskilled and semi to skilled would have the greatest incentive to migrate, but they would have to have enough money to cover the expense of migration.³¹ Since air travel between New York and Puerto Rico was so cheap, money was not a large barrier.

Language:

With migration back and forth as well as the close political and economic ties to the United States, there was a debate as to how much English should be taught in schools. Catholic Schools in Puerto Rico taught more English than public schools. Some advocates of Spanish thought that the Catholic Schools were acting as Americanizing agents.³² However, the Puerto Rican secretary of education thought that “English to language schools were acceptable in several situations, such as for students from the mainland and for students whose parents wanted them to have full to time English instruction.”³³ This creates a gap between families who could afford to pay for Catholic education knowing two languages as opposed to families whose children went to public school knowing only one. This is further complicated if a family moved back from New York and could not afford Catholic education in order to teach their children Spanish and English. Yet, in Puerto Rico overall, there had become a loyalty to Spanish. In 1965 the

³⁰ Friedlander, Labor Migration, 24

³¹ Friedlander, Labor Migration, : 28

³² Morris, Puerto Rico, 54.

³³ Ibid.

Supreme Court of Puerto Rico rejected a petition for an attorney to argue a case in English saying that “It is a fact no subject to historical rectification that the vehicle of expression, the language of the Puerto Rican people—integral part of our origin and of our Hispanic culture—had been and continues to be Spanish.”³⁴

Puerto Ricans in New York

Racism

Puerto Ricans who moved to New York faced challenges with the different cultural and social values in New York and Puerto Rico. “In the United States, a man’s color determined what class he belongs to, in Puerto Rico, a man’s class determines what his color is.”³⁵ Race was not determined purely by descent but rather by physical features as well as social standing.³⁶ This distinction made it hard for Puerto Ricans to understand the black/white racial division that they were suddenly thrown into. In New York, the Anglo culture might classify a Puerto Rican as black who might consider himself or herself white or trigueño. The majority of Puerto Ricans were multi racial which made it hard to be classified under a black or white group.³⁷ This classification as black or white caused major social upheaval and changes in the 1960’s and 1970’s. In a 1974 study by Langer, Gerstein and Eisbes it was found that Spanish and black students experienced more stress than white students due to ethnic membership.³⁸ Blacks and Hispanics also had higher rates of admission into psychiatric hospitals.

³⁴ Morris, Puerto Rico, 55

³⁵ Fitzpatrick, J.P. *The Meaning of Migration to the Mainland*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1971.106

³⁶ Duany, Puerto Rico, 245

³⁷ Morales, Puerto Rican Poverty 26

³⁸ Torre, Commuter Nation, 223

Puerto Ricans also experienced social marginalization similar to African Americans. It has been suggested that the way that Anglos view Puerto Ricans has a “significant impact on their segregation from Anglos as well as their economic status.”³⁹ Puerto Ricans who are viewed as African American tend to live in poorer areas that are occupied by fewer whites and greater African American population. These areas also tend to have fewer economic resources available.⁴⁰ Puerto Ricans who self to identify as “black,” it has been suggested, have “lower earnings than those [who self to identify as] ‘white’ Puerto Ricans.”⁴¹ This may be due to living in economically disadvantaged areas that are more easily impacted by economic restructuring and tend to have fewer resources for education. It has been found that:

“neighborhood characteristics—typically operationalized by census to derived indicators such as low to income neighbors, female to headed households, male joblessness, residential instability, neighborhood poverty, and welfare receipt—exert potentially negative effects on children’s’ cognitive and behavioral development and on teenager’s educational attainment, fertility, and delinquent behavior.”⁴²

Thus the neighborhood that children grow up in, not necessarily the race they identify with, affected their earning potential.

The racial identity that Puerto Ricans see themselves—as well as the race they are identified by Anglos—affect the neighborhoods that Puerto Ricans lived in. These neighborhoods in return effect the values of children in the neighborhood. One such example is called “contagion” which “emphasizes the role of neighbors and peers as

³⁹ Santiago, A.M. & Galster, G. “*Puerto Rican Segregation in the United States: Cause or consequence of economic status?*” *Social Problems* 42(1995):361. 365

⁴⁰ Santiago, Puerto Rican Segregation, 365

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Rosenbaum, E. and Friedman, S. “Differences in the Locational Attainment of Immigrant and Native to Born Households with Children in New York City.” *Demography* 38 (2001): 337 to 348. 338

actors whose own behavior influences that of individual children or youths.⁴³ If children are around socially undesirable behavior they are more likely to pick up that socially undesirable behavior. Another way neighborhoods affect children is through “collective socialization, “which”emphasizes the importance of adult role models and other adults who monitor and supervise children’s activities.”⁴⁴ Without enough adult role models children’s misbehavior is not corrected.

Along with racial discrimination, Puerto Ricans have had to deal with language barriers. Living in less affluent neighborhoods, the schools that Puerto Ricans went to had very few Spanish-speaking teachers. New migrants would be put down a grade or even put into slower classes in school until they could learn to speak English; this could be seen in the book “When I was Puerto Rican” by Esmeralda Santiago. Also demonstrated in Santiago’s book was how workers in the governmental offices did not speak Spanish. Parents had to take their children out of school and bring them into governmental offices in order to communicate. A 1979 report of the Office of Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare charged the New York City Department of Welfare for discrimination against Hispanics. “The lack of Spanish to speaking personnel frequently resulted in financial loses for Hispanic clients.”⁴⁵ Puerto Rico community groups had to compete with African American social groups for funding in the city and school districts.

Family issues in New York

Puerto Rican mothers, who had the most impact of their children were very anxious about their neighborhood in New York City; “mothers had been anxious, fearful

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Fitzpatrick, The Meaning, 97 to 98

and suspicious about the neighborhood and communicated their fears to children.”⁴⁶ This fearfulness came from the coldness of the weather and the people of New York as well the inadequate living.⁴⁷ The fear was lessened by the extended family influence. Extended family helped new migrants with places to live and where to find jobs. Extended family also helped to take care of young children if the mother decided to work. “The role of extended family was found to be the most significant variable in difference between addicts and non addicts” in a study in the late 1970’s.⁴⁸ The role of extended family was especially important when families divorced and with female headed households.

It was very hard for Puerto Rican families to stay together with the stresses of migration. “Among women that migrated after age 18 and had been in a union, close to 40% had ended that union.”⁴⁹ Men needed meaningful jobs to support their families and when jobs were unavailable to them the family suffered. In the Puerto Rican culture men supported their family and earned respect from the family for their support; men did not feel they earned their families respect when they could not provide.⁵⁰ Further, with more women earning a living on their own, they did not need to stay in unfulfilling marriage; there was an “increase in the gainful employment of married women with children and available welfare that has made women economically independent...like never before.”⁵¹ However, Puerto Ricans were not necessarily able to participate in the labor force; “Puerto Rican women had lower labor force participation rates during the 1970s and

⁴⁶ Torre, Commuter Nation, 224

⁴⁷ Torre, Commuter Nation, 292

⁴⁸ Fitzpatrick, The Meaning, 85

⁴⁹ Falcoń, L.M., and Gurak, D.T. “Poverty, Migration, and the Underclass.” *Latino Studies Journal* 5 (1994):77 to 95. 8081

⁵⁰ Fitzpatrick, The Meaning,. 100

⁵¹ Fitzpatrick, The Meaning,. 98

1980s than other groups of women.”⁵² It was hard to earn enough money in New York City to live adequately on one paycheck or even on welfare. “In New York City, in 1980, 75% of the Puerto Rican female headed families with their own children were below the poverty level.”⁵³ Not all female to headed households were because of divorce; many women had children young and never married; “48.4% of Puerto Rican children in New York were born out of wedlock.”⁵⁴ In 1980, 79% of Puerto Rican female householders with no spouse present had children under 18.⁵⁵ In Puerto Rico, an unwed mother and her child would be taken care of by extended family; however, this extended family was not always available in New York City.⁵⁶ Not having extended family to take care of children was confounded by the women migrants who self to select to come to New York.

It was also found that woman migrants, compared to women who stay in Puerto Rico, “come from larger families, have less rural backgrounds, less education, considerably more marital disruption, and were less likely to have been employed before migration.”⁵⁷ By migrants who self to select to come to New York having all of the above characteristics the Puerto Rican community in New York will have a greater chance of living in poverty. This likelihood of a low standard of living is due to the high amount of female to headed households and their low income potential; overall, “about half of children in mother to only families are poor, compared to roughly one in 10

⁵² Figueroa, J.B. and Melendez, E. “The Importance of Family Members in Determining the Labor Supply of Puerto Rican, Black and White Single Mothers.” *Social Science Quarterly* 74 (1993): 867 to 883.

⁵³ Fitzpatrick, *The Meaning*, 98

⁵⁴ Torre, *Commuter Nation*, 221

⁵⁵ Torre, *Commuter Nation*, 222

⁵⁶ Fitzpatrick, *The Meaning*, 93

⁵⁷ Falcoń, *The Poverty*, 80

children in married to couple families.”⁵⁸ Children who grow up with only one parent are not only more likely to live in poverty but are also more likely to drop out of high school—leading to a lower earning potential throughout life.⁵⁹ Children born into poverty are thus more likely to repeat the cycle and have children young, out of unions, or not stay in unions; this created a cycle of poverty. This cycle can be seen in the increase of births born outside of a union; “approximately 14% of births in the 1950s occurred before the mother’s first union or between unions, 20% of births in the 1970s and 23% of births in the 1980s were to mother who were not living with a partner.”⁶⁰ Poverty among children of immigrants “increased steadily and rapidly to from about 12% in 1970 to 33% in the late 1990s.”⁶¹ This cycle of poverty is hard to break and some people decided that a life in Puerto Rico might have better economic opportunities for them.

Migration back to Puerto Rico

However, migrants did move from the United States back to Puerto Rico. Between 1970 and 1980, New York City lost “well over a ½ million jobs in the unskilled and semi to skilled sector.”⁶² Although, jobs in the skilled white to collard sector, increased many Puerto Ricans due to their high drop to out rate in high school did not qualify for skilled jobs.⁶³ This loss of jobs in New York caused migration back to Puerto Rico. It was found that the number of students living the United States at some point of

⁵⁸ Landale, N.S. & Hauan, S.M. “The Family Life Course of Puerto Rican Children.” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*. 54 (1992): 913

⁵⁹ Landale *The Family Life*, 913

⁶⁰ Landale *The Family Life*, 918

⁶¹ Van Hook, J., Brown, S.L., & Kwenda, M.N. “Decomposition of Trends in Poverty Among Children of Immigrants.” *Demography* 41 (2004):649

⁶² Fitzpatrick, *The Meaning*, 101

⁶³ *Ibid.*

their life was 9.2% in 1977 to 1978 which is up from 1.5.”⁶⁴ Sixty to five percent of these students were born in the United States and the number of students that lived in the United States was up from 1.5% in 1969 to 1970.⁶⁵ This increase in students showed that families moved back to Puerto Rico from the United States. A “study by Eva Sandis indicated general improvement in the situation of return migrants...[they had] higher levels of education, occupation and income than the residents of Puerto Rico.”⁶⁶ However migration was not always positive experience.

People who migrated from the United States to Puerto Rico did not always experience more success than non-migrants. Migrants from New York had a hard time with their cultural identity. Many migrants identified with being Puerto Rican in New York, but were not seen as Puerto Rican in Puerto Rico.⁶⁷ This was very hard since they had to not only fight prejudice in New York for their ethnicity but also in Puerto Rico. Migrants from New York were identified as “Neuyoricans.” Usually, they used English to communicate and spoke Spanish incorrectly. They also had aggressive and alien values to native Puerto Ricans;⁶⁸ this rejection of Neuyoricans could be seen through a “diffused negative stereotype” of Neuyoricans.⁶⁹ An influential anthropologist, Eduardo Seda Bonilla (1972) expressed that “Neuryicans faced an acute identity problem owing to the loss of their cultural roots and racial discrimination in the United States.”⁷⁰ Students

⁶⁴ Torre, Commuter Nation ,300

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Fitzpatrick, The Meaning, 23

⁶⁷ Torre, Commuter Nation ,291

⁶⁸ Torre, Commuter Nation ,290

⁶⁹ Duany, Puerto Rico, 167

⁷⁰ Ibid.

who lived in New York were also more likely to use legal and illegal drugs more often than the students who had always lived in Puerto Rico.⁷¹

Life for the family in Puerto Rico was not always much better. In the early Twentieth century a portion of families were made up of consensual unions which had a recognized status; for example in 1899, 34.7% of unions in Puerto Rico were consensual, this number dropped to 24.9% in 1950 and 4.8% in 1980.⁷² This drop in consensual unions was due to the benefits of marriage rising and the values of middle class becoming more evident.⁷³ The decline in consensual unions was also due to the rising status of women. Like in New York, women in Puerto Rico were able to find work in factories. This changed the workings of the Puerto Rican family because one of the “features of the Puerto Rican family is the superior authority exercised by the man;”⁷⁴ and with women bringing home money, this changed the dynamics of home life. Yet, it has been suggested that the women who were born in Puerto Rico, or migrate back to Puerto Rico from the mainland are better educated and have more stable unions. “While those with more education, employment experience, lower fertility, and more stable marital unions were less likely to migrate to the mainland, mainland residents with those characteristics (except employment) were more likely to leave the mainland and return to Puerto Rico.”⁷⁵ This greater stability of families in Puerto Rico should help Puerto Ricans to have better economic security on the island than they do in New York City. However, in Puerto Rico in 1984, 60% of all Puerto Ricans qualified for Food Stamps for the Federal

⁷¹ Torre, *Commuter Nation*, 223

⁷² Fitzpatrick, *The Meaning*, 75

⁷³ Fitzpatrick, *The Meaning*, 76

⁷⁴ Fitzpatrick, *The Meaning*, 72

⁷⁵ Falcoń, *Poverty*, 81

Government.⁷⁶ Puerto Ricans experienced poverty because of the lack of available jobs, proper education and the break up of the extended family.

Overall, Puerto Ricans did not benefit from migration to New York. In 1982, 45% of all Hispanics (mostly Puerto Ricans) living in New York City were living below the poverty level.⁷⁷ Between 1970 and 1980 European migrants have “fled the City and have left the Puerto Ricans part of the inner city... 83% of all children in New York City Public School system are Black, Hispanic and Asian.”⁷⁸ A large number of Puerto Ricans (138,000) migrated out of New York City between 1980 and 1990; this was about 15% of the population.⁷⁹ While this migration did not really change the make to up the Puerto Rican population in New York; the city lost 3 times as many two to parent households as single parent families.⁸⁰

Puerto Ricans in New York and Puerto Rico had a low living standard. The migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States and New York specifically is a very unique migration since very few obstacles lie in the way of migration. Without these obstacles, it is very easy for the poorest and least educated to migrate to New York. Since, the better to educated migrants can obtain better jobs and move out of New York City, it is the poorest migrants who become marginalized into a cycle of poverty. Due to the color system in Puerto Rico, it is the Puerto Ricans who self to identify as, and are seen by the Anglos as “white” that have the money and educated to assimilate into the mainland culture. Further, the cycle of poverty leads to broken, female headed

⁷⁶ Morales, Puerto Rican Poverty, 36

⁷⁷ Fitzpatrick, Puerto Rican New Yorkers, 12

⁷⁸ Fitzpatrick, J.P. “Puerto Rican New Yorkers 1990.” (Feature Articles). *Migration World Magazine* 23 (1995):16

⁷⁹ Fitzpatrick, Puerto Rican New Yorkers, 16

⁸⁰ Fitzpatrick Puerto Rican New Yorkers, 17

households and children who do not have access to the education and other resources available in more affluent neighborhoods. Thus, while the self to selection of migrants is a major influence in the poverty of New York Puerto Ricans, limited access to education, better neighborhoods and childcare perpetuate the cycle of poverty.

Theories of Migration

There are many theories on why Puerto Rican who migrated to New York did not do as well economically as previous migrants. One theory on migration believes that the larger the obstacles migrants face to migrant the higher the selectivity of the migrant. Thus, if there is higher costs associated with migration in either time or money only people that could afford to migrate would. Migrants who had less money would not be able to afford to migrate. Other theories include people who are better off, higher educated or have more money would not feel the need to migrate. Thus, migrants would be from the lower economic rungs of their native country would have felt pulled to migrate to find better economic situation. Not all migrants move permanently either, as seen in Donna Gabaccia, Italy's Many Diasporas, many Italian men migrated to make money to buy land and then returned back to Italy.⁸¹ Migrants also move within one country. Internal migrants “tend to be less constrained in their destinations and are more apt to respond to “pushes” and “pulls” of the labor market.”⁸² Finally, there could be political or religious reasons for a migrant to move from their home country.

⁸¹ Gabaccia, D. *Italy's Many Diasporas*. University of Washington Press, 2000

⁸² Frey, W.H. “Immigration, domestic migration, and demographic Balkanization in America: new evidence.” *Population and Development Review* 22 (1996) 741

Some scholars call Puerto Rican migration “circular migration (also known as commuter, swallow, or revolving to door migration.”⁸³ This is because some Puerto Rican migrants move seasonally or for short periods of time because of availability of work. It is not only Puerto Rican migrants though who took part in circular migration. It is estimated that “3 to 4 percent of the entire Caribbean population may be considered circulators.”⁸⁴ It has been argued “circular migration has a negative impact on human capital”⁸⁵ because it does not allow opportunities for advancement with the development of new skills or experience. Also, children of families that migrate often do not get the continuous schooling needed to learn. On the other hand, circular migration allows for flexibility in working where there are jobs; thus economic downturns do not affect the family as dramatically if they only worked in one environment.⁸⁶

With the ease of transportation in the late Twentieth century migrations need to be viewed under a different microscope. There are several different kinds of modern swallows, such as “temporary migrant workers, professional athletes, entertainers, health sciences personnel, academics and children” outlined that have been outlined by Aaron Segal (1996).⁸⁷ These migrants have very different reasons for traveling than traditional migrants. Migrants might move for new experiences, better jobs or even a better environment. Also, migration, especially internal migration, can be undertaken without any major obstacles to surpass. Thus, the question must be asked: if migration is so easy, does this make it less beneficial to the migrant? Is the ease of migration the overriding reason for poverty among Puerto Ricans?

⁸³ Duany, Mobile livelihoods, 355

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

Puerto Rican poverty in New York City has to do with much more than just the ease of migration or even the migrants themselves. Poverty was started through the rapid increase in population on the small Island. It was increased through the dramatic economic changes both on Puerto Rico and in New York City that caused a loss of blue to collar jobs that most migrants held. Exacerbating the poverty was the break to up of the family through cultural changes. Extended family helped take care of children and allowed for a pooling of resources; without that family children did not have as many role models in their lives nor was there as many breadwinners for the family to rely on. Added to this was the racial atmosphere of the late Twentieth century. Finally, Puerto Ricans faced racial discrimination in New York from both whites and blacks. This combination of a rapidly changing economic and cultural environment together with its affect the Puerto Rican family caused the poverty seen among Puerto Ricans at the end of 1980's.

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