

RICARDO E. ALEGRÍA

HUMANIST OF THE YEAR 1990



Master Conference

NOTES ON MY CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEFENSE, PROMOTION AND ENRICHMENT OF PUERTO RICAN CULTURE

Greetings:

Mr. Oscar Rodríguez, representative of the Honorable Rafael Hernández Colón, governor of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the Honorable Héctor Luis Acevedo, mayor of San Juan, Hiram R. Cancio, president of the Puerto Rican Endowment for the Humanities, José M. García Gómez, former chairman of the Board of Directors, Dr. Juan M. González Lamela, executive director, distinguished members of the Board of Directors, visitors, ladies and gentlemen.

Lecture:

I must begin these words by expressing my sincere gratitude to the Puerto Rican Endowment for the Humanities and, in particular, its three most recent chairs, Professor Eladio Rivera Quiñones, Hiram R. Cancio Esq. and architect José M. García Gómez, its executive director, my friend Juan M. González Lamela, as well as all of the members of the Board of Directors, for the honor of recognition granted to me today. Apart from the distinction it represents, it is especially significant to me because of the fact that, along with Dr. Arturo Morales Carrión, Ángel Martín Esq., and others, in 1976, I was one of the founders and organizers of the Foundation, as well as the fact that the honor granted to me today associates my name with those of distinguished Puerto Ricans who have enriched our national culture. The names of writers and literary critics Dr. Concha Meléndez and Margot Arce de Vázquez; of historians Isabel Gutiérrez del Arroyo and Lidio Cruz Monclova; of writer and critic José A. Balseiro, of novelist Professor Enrique Laguerre; of educator Jaime Benítez and playwright Francisco Arriví, are honorable company.

I must recognize that the honor given to me, as described in the kind biographical sketch about me read by my good friend Professor Eladio Rivera Quiñones, has been motivated and justified primarily by my long and continuous dedication to the defense, preservation, promotion and popularization of our national culture. I must confess that, apart from my family, this work has been my main obsession during the last 50 years of my life. It has always been tied to my love for and devotion to Puerto Rico, and my vocation in archaeology, history and folklore, which are disciplines I have pursued since my days as a student.

That is why, following the example of the other distinguished compatriots who were honored in the past with the distinction granted to me today, and following the recommendations some of my friends have given me, that I will take advantage of the opportunity you have given me to try to provide a condensed synthesis of my work in the field of the humanities and explain, sincerely, the reasons that have moved me to dedicate the majority of my life to it. I should therefore ask you to excuse me for offering facts that may appear too personal. I should also recognize that it is possible that some of you, who are

listening to me today, do not share all of my points of view and my interpretations of the cultural situation of Puerto Rico, but these are nothing more than my sincere interpretations and never had any other objective than to contribute to strengthening the national awareness of my fellow citizens, and spreading the most valued examples of our culture to other Puerto Ricans, to our brother nations in the Spanish Americas, to Spain, and to other nations. The only reason for taking on this task has been my pride and love for Puerto Rico and its national culture, and a firm belief that you cannot love and serve what you do not understand.

This patriotic vocation was motivated and stimulated by my parents. I was born and lived, until I entered the University, in Old San Juan, in front of Plaza de Colón, in the historical triangle formed by the San Cristóbal Fort, the Puerto Rico Casino, where today we find the José Julián Acosta School and the Municipal Theater, the cultural center of San Juan in the 1920s and 1930s. My mother, Celeste Gallardo, came from an old San Juan family that owned a sugar cane estate in Loíza. She was proud of her family, and both she and my Aunt Elisita passed on to me the family history and the traditions and folklore of Old San Juan and Loíza. My father, José S. Alegría, was born in Dorado and had been raised in Barceloneta, where his father was mayor. Although he studied and practiced law, he was mainly a poet, journalist and politician. He was one of the founders of the Nationalist Party and was its president in 1927. Later, he represented the Liberal Party in the House of Representatives, was president of the Puerto Rico Casino, and was director of the magazine *Puerto Rico Ilustrado*.

My house on San Francisco Street, in front of Plaza de Colón, was the site of discussions that included outstanding intellectuals such as Emilio S. Belaval, Rafael López Sicardó, Augusto Rodríguez, Rafael Ríos Rey, and others. Personalities such as Pedro Albizu Campos and other political leaders also visited. My father had one of the best private libraries on the island and scholars such as Antonio S. Pedreira, Lidio Cruz Monclova and Rafael W. Ramírez made use of it. The walls of the house were adorned with paintings by José Campeche, Francisco Oller, Jordán, López de Victoria, Díaz Mackena and other outstanding artists of ours, when there was still no way to put a value on Puerto Rican art.

It was in this environment that my love and understanding of Puerto Rican culture began. In those years, I learned about the struggle by the island's intellectuals to defend and preserve our culture.

These were the years of the struggle to maintain Spanish as the language of Puerto Ricans. As a child, I read and heard, without understanding much, of my father's controversies in the press with the Commissioner of Public Education, who, following specific instructions from Washington, insisted on the anti-pedagogical theory of teaching all elementary school materials in English.

Recently, it is with some surprise that I have read and heard some people say that our culture has not needed defending because it has never been threatened. That our mother language, Spanish, needs no defense. These people apparently do not know some of the chapters of our history. They do not know how in 1899, shortly after the invasion of U.S. troops, Dr. Victor Clark, president of the Education Council that the United States Government had established to replace the one inherited from Spain, had said in his report:

“...The majority of the people on the island do not speak pure Spanish. Their language is a *patois* almost unintelligible to natives of Barcelona and Madrid. It has no literature of its own and has little value as an intellectual medium. It is possible that it would be almost as easy to educate these people away from their *patois* in English as it would be to educate them in the elegant language of Castile. Apart from a small minority educated in Europe and imbued with European ideals of education and government, we cannot anticipate active resistance to the introduction of the American Educational System and the English language.”

After hearing these expressions, did our intellectuals of the early decades of the 20th century not have to defend our culture and our mother tongue? Mr. Clark was not just any American whose opinion did not raise cause for concern. I repeat, he was president of the Education Council.

[There is more historical evidence to show that it was necessary to defend our culture and our language from the strong and planned attempts at assimilation on the part of the United States Government and its representatives and collaborators in Puerto Rico.]

It can be argued that Mr. Clark was the product of the military government that the United States imposed on us after the occupation. In 1901, distinguished U.S. educator Dr. Martin Brumbaugh, appointed Commissioner of Public Education in Puerto Rico by the president of the United States, under the civil government, supported Clark's opinions when he said, in his report on education on the island: "The people speak a very imperfect Spanish. The rural teachers and many of the grade schools have the same *patois*."

It is worth noting that later Mr. Brumbaugh recognized the love that Puerto Ricans had for their mother tongue.

We shouldn't think that the U.S. government's educational policy had a perverse purpose. It reflected what had been done before in the territories of Arizona, New Mexico and Texas, when they were taken from Mexico and incorporated into the United States. These territories were destined to become states, and for that it was necessary, as it was repeated time and again, in every discussion of the topic, for Americanization to precede political integration. English, the de facto official language of the United States, was and continues to be the key to Americanization.

Another measure implemented by Commissioner Brumbaugh in the schools of Puerto Rico, with the purpose of accelerating Americanization, was something called "patriotic exercises." In his interesting report, he said:

"...raising the flag is the signal that school has begun and the flag waves throughout the session. Students sing America, Hail Columbus, the Star Spangled Banner and other patriotic songs."

Another favorite exercise, he continued, "was the pledge to the United States flag every morning when entering the school and pledging allegiance to the great republic it represents." The Commissioner also proudly related "other patriotic exercises" that took place to mark the birthdays of Washington, Lincoln, etc., and, proud of fulfilling his mandate of Americanization, he told the Secretary of the Interior: "At least 25,000 children participate in these exercises and perhaps 50,000 citizens join in these patriotic demonstrations." And he emphasized, with pride, "The exercises have done much to Americanize the island, more than any other agency. Young minds are being molded to follow Washington's example."

Although I entered elementary school some years after Mr. Brumbaugh began his "patriotic exercises," I suffered the impact of them. They had on me, and I'm sure on many other students, an effect that was contrary to what Mr. Brumbaugh expected and proudly announced. Yes, I admired the figures of Washington, Jefferson, Patrick Henry, Lincoln and other patriots, but I knew, because my father had taught me, that in Puerto Rico we also had national heroes who had sacrificed and struggled for Puerto Rico. It wasn't Lincoln who had abolished slavery in Puerto Rico, as they made us believe, but rather the struggle of Betances, Acosta, Baldorioty and Ruiz Belvis; it was not Washington who had fought for Puerto Rico's freedom, but rather the heroes of the Grito de Lares, Betances, José de Diego and the man who was agitating in those years, Pedro Albizu Campos. Their portraits were not in the schools alongside those of Washington and Lincoln, but they were in my thoughts, and they hung on the walls of my father's office.

I attended elementary school in the public school in Old San Juan, at the José Julián Acosta School and at the Román Baldorioty de Castro School. The pedagogical method imposed on us, such as teaching arithmetic, geography and history in English, as well as the textbooks, in which we never saw ourselves represented, encouraged an inferiority complex that still characterizes many of our compatriots and a rebellion that made us not want to learn English.

In those years, the second semester of classes began in the first days of the year, and Three Kings Day, like our historical anniversaries, was a school day. It took a general strike and a life lost to have November 19, Puerto Rico Discovery Day, declared a holiday.

I arrived at Central High School in the years when bubbling nationalism was at its peak, the years of shootouts in Río Piedras, the assassination of Colonel Riggs and the nationalists Beuchamp and Rosado, and the Ponce Massacre.

There I had the privilege of studying with Antonio Sarriera, with José Colón and with Inés María Mendoza. It was under her guidance that I began studying Puerto Rican literature, reading *El jíbaro* by Manuel Alonso. It was during those years that teaching licenses were cancelled for making patriotic statements in defense of teaching in Spanish, our mother tongue, before a committee that investigated the political situation on the island. Some of us students published a letter of protest in *El Imparcial* that earned us a suspension.

About that time, specifically in 1937, President Franklin D. Roosevelt wrote to educator José M. Gallardo, a Puerto Rican who had lived for nearly thirty years in the United States, and who had been appointed Commissioner of Public Education, and reiterated the need for Puerto Ricans to learn English. In the same message, he reminded him that English "is the language of our nation" and he repeated that Gallardo was appointed with the understanding that "English is the official language of our nation."

Given those instructions, Commissioner Gallardo set aside the plan imposed years earlier by José Padín and tried to impose English. His plan failed and Washington was angry. A Senate Committee visited the island to see how things were going and one of the senators could not understand how, after more than 40 years of U.S. rule, the valet who waited on him in the hotel could not speak English. Commissioner Gallardo lost his usefulness when, in a statement before a Senate committee in the United States, he had the courage to recognize failure and declare that:

"...the greatest error of all is thinking that we can achieve true bilingualism. In Puerto Rico, it is impossible to achieve a situation in which the people can dominate the two languages equally well."

Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes wrote to Gallardo, scolding him for his statements, saying:

"I am very disappointed and I will, of course, have to fulfill my obligation to inform the president of my feelings."

Shortly thereafter, Commissioner Gallardo had to resign his educational post.

Several years later, in 1946, another chapter occurred in the history of our defense of Spanish and our culture. The Legislature, then dominated by the Popular Democratic Party, approved a bill by Senator Rafael Arjona Siaca that established Spanish as the language of instruction. The interim governor vetoed it and the Legislature approved it over the governor's veto. Under the laws of Puerto Rico of the time, the bill then had to be considered by the President of the United States, Harry S. Truman. When he vetoed the law providing for Spanish as the language of instruction, Truman said something that is still relevant today:

“...the solution to Puerto Rico’s political status can be complicated and its solutions set back by the adoption now of a new linguistic policy.”

Once again, politics prevailed over culture and education.

An outstanding U.S. educator, Dr. Algerman Coleman, sent by the U.S. government to study the problem of teaching in English after the failure by Dr. Gallardo, criticized the educational system he found and bravely said:

“The text books used in the schools are all foreign to the lives of young people on the island.”

He also talked about the policy behind teaching in English and said:

“When someone has proposed a more limited but perhaps more achievable objective, they have been accused of being anti-American by those who look at teaching in English from a point of view that is not educational.”

But the situation did not end there. In 1946, President Truman, who had vetoed the legislation for teaching in Spanish, appointed, based on the recommendation of Governor Jesús T. Piñero, Professor Mariano Villaronga as Commissioner of Public Education. Everyone in Puerto Rico knew that Mr. Villaronga was in favor of teaching in Spanish, so a committee of the leaders in favor of the political assimilation of Puerto Rico traveled to the United States, visited the Senate and ensured that the nomination was not confirmed.

It was not until 1949, when Governor Muñoz Marín named him Commissioner of Public Education, that teaching in Spanish was made the official policy through a department notice, with subsequent political protests and interpretations.

The purpose of this review is to show that the preservation and defense of our mother tongue, Spanish, has had and continues to have political repercussions. And some still say there is no need to defend our culture! But let’s return to our story.

In 1939, after spending a semester in the Polytechnic Institute in San Germán, I enrolled at the University of Puerto Rico. There, I experienced the activities of the campaign and triumph of the recently created Popular Democratic Party. I helped by correcting proofs of *El Batey* in the La Democracia building during the elections, and because I was not old enough to vote, I acted as a “runner” directing voters to their respective polls. After the PDP’s triumph, the university administration wanted to appease the students and several of us were put in charge of organizing the first Student Council, of which I was a member for several years and its secretary. In 1940, along with Luis Muñoz Lee, I founded the magazine *Caribe*, which lasted for three years. The purpose of the magazine was to highlight our history and culture. An editorial in the magazine proposed the creation of a Center for Puerto Rican Studies.

That was when I decided to study archaeology and history. My professors, Rafael W. Ramírez, Sebastián González García, Lidio Cruz Monclova and Gustavo Agrait, influenced my decision. Another one of my professors, Jaime Benítez, also had a great influence on my formation.

I helped my history professor, Rafael W. Ramírez, in the small museum he organized as a workshop for his class.

In 1941, I won the Puerto Rican Athenaeum Prize in a contest about the history of Puerto Rico.

During my college years, I organized a group of archaeologists to undertake explorations around the island and I also fought against the racial prejudice that some college fraternities had imported from other educational centers.

This fight led me to create a fraternity that was free of racial and social prejudice. In selecting a symbol, we set aside the heraldic shields that are traditionally used and selected a petroglyph from our indigenous people, showing a man without color, race or social status. Now, that fraternity is 50 years old.

In the middle of 1942, I left for the United States to begin my graduate studies in anthropology. I had tried to go to Mexico, but the circumstances of the war prevented it, and I decided to go to the University of Chicago, which at the time was the favored graduate school at the University of Puerto Rico.

In Chicago, I spent three and a half years studying anthropology, history, archaeology and museum management. I had the privilege of studying with great teachers such as archaeologist Fay Cooper Cole, social anthropologist Robert Redfield and physical anthropologist Wilton Krogman. I also attended lectures by Melville Herskovits that were the precursor to studies about blacks in the United States. I did archaeological excavations in southern Illinois, and I lived on a Winnebago Indian reservation in Wisconsin. For two years, I participated in a workshop and course at the Field Museum in Chicago and helped mount an exhibition.

I returned at the end of 1946 with a master's degree in anthropology with a specialization in archaeology. I had made trips to various museums in the United States, studying the Antillean archaeological collections and obtaining donations of archaeological and ethnographic objects for the University of Puerto Rico Museum.

Upon my return, I was named assistant director of the U.P.R. Museum, which I reorganized, and shortly thereafter, when I became director, I renamed it the Museum of Anthropology, History and Art. I founded the University's Center for Archaeological and Ethnological Research. During those years, I undertook excavations in Luquillo, Loíza, Utuado and Ponce. In Loíza, in the María La Cruz cave, the first evidence of the existence of a pre-agricultural, pre-ceramic culture in Puerto Rico was discovered. At the Hacienda Grande site, we found the oldest evidence of the first agricultural people on the island, called the Hacienda Grande Culture. In Utuado, the Taino plazas and bateys were re-excavated and efforts began to acquire the site and begin its restoration. In Ponce, we also did an excavation in the Cañas area.

In those years, I met and married Mela Pons, who has been my companion and most assiduous collaborator ever since. Not only has she illustrated my books, but she has also been responsible for artistically installing all of the exhibitions I have organized and has designed the museums I have founded.

From our marriage came Ricardo, a lawyer, and José Francisco, a social anthropologist. With the award I won in a contest in Spain, I published my first book, *La Fiesta de Santiago Apóstol en Loíza*, which was also the basis for a documentary that is today the oldest documentary filmed in color.

La Fiesta de Santiago Apóstol en Loíza was aimed at studying and spreading awareness of an example of a contribution of the black culture to our island.

Remembering my studies of Indians in elementary school, which presented them as if they were the Indians of the films of the American West, I wrote the book *Historia de nuestros indios*, which my wife, Mela, illustrated, to try to do justice to the story of our Indians. Since then, in our schools the culture of the indigenous people who populated our land has been studied.

In the 1940s in the University Museum, for the first time we had retrospective exhibitions of Puerto Rican painting from José Campeche to Rafael Tufiño. We also had permanent exhibitions on famous men of Puerto Rico, including Hostos, Betances, Tapia, Brau, Muñoz Rivera, De Diego and Barbosa. There were permanent exhibitions on popular imagery, arts and crafts and the black heritage in the Santiago Apóstol Festival in Loíza.

These cultural activities also had to be defended. We were criticized for using taxpayer

money to dig up “primitive” objects of Indians, that we exhibited carvings of saints as if they were art objects, and that we made a book and a film about a black festival. At the same time, in Loíza we were accused of saying there were elements of African culture in their culture. The time had not arrived for black studies.

In 1953, I received a Guggenheim Fellowship to study for my doctorate. I tried once again to go to Mexico, but I could not, so I decided to go to Harvard. There I had the opportunity to study under one of the most outstanding archeologists of the Americas, Dr. Gordon Willey, as well as social anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn and physical anthropologist Earnest Hooton. I stayed at Harvard for almost two years and, in addition to taking doctoral courses, I had the opportunity to install the exhibition of Antillean archaeology in the Peabody Museum.

I returned in the middle of 1954, and not long afterward a controversy began over the recommendation by Governor Luis Muñoz Marín to create an Institute of Puerto Rican Culture.

The idea of creating a governmental institution to contribute to the preservation and defense of our culture was the product of the inspiration of Inés Mendoza de Muñoz Marín, and it had the support of people such as Arturo Morales Carrión, Mariano Villaronga, Antonio J. Colorado and Teodoro Vidal, among others.

The news of the intention to create an Institute of Puerto Rican Culture caused a reaction similar to the one seen with the policy of teaching in Spanish, and the one to the recent declaration of Spanish as the official language. It was debated in the press and some tried, with some success, to compare Puerto Rican culture with Western and universal culture. Some denied the existence of a national culture and accused the government, in this case Luis Muñoz Marín, of being anti-American, separatist, and of trying to establish an entity to impose cultural direction that was worthy of totalitarian and communist countries. It was insinuated that it was a chauvinist action and the first step toward separating Puerto Rico from the United States.

The opponents, fearful of losing everything, tried to suppress the Puerto Rican part of the name, insisting it be called the Puerto Rican Institute of Culture.

Fortunately, the recommendation of Governor Muñoz Marín, so vilified by some at the time and so praised today, won and the Legislature, under the leadership of Ernesto Ramos Antonini and Jorge Font Saldaña in the House of Representatives and Samuel R. Quiñones in the Senate, approved the legislation and in June of 1955, the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture was formed.

Governor Muñoz Marín appointed an excellent Board of Directors consisting of anthropologist Eugenio Fernández Méndez, historian Arturo Morales Carrión, jurist José Trías Monge, novelist Enrique Laguerre and writers Salvador Tió and José Buitrago, along with Mr. Teodoro Vidal.

It was this Board that named me to organize and direct the institution. Not long thereafter, Governor Muñoz Marín confirmed my nomination. For some time, a hostile attitude toward the institution prevailed among some people. There was strong opposition to many of our programs, such as the restoration of historic zones. More than one person thought he could stop our progress, lobbying to be allowed to demolish blocks of houses between Plaza de Colón and Plaza de Armas. In Ponce, they wanted to create a “little New York.” Another program that drew criticism and ridicule was the support for artisans. It was said that this kind of artistic expression was for Third World countries and that artisans’ work had no artistic value that could be judged. Some professors referred to the institute as “Aguadilla in San Juan,” which was, at the time, the only store selling artisans’ work in the capital.

Puerto Rican theater festivals were frequently attacked and some asked that they be suspended.

We remained firm in our programs and the fact that we had been able to establish

cultural centers in many of the towns gave us strength that caused some politicians to begin to reconsider their attacks on Puerto Rican culture. By the late 1960s, our people had rediscovered and taken pride in their traditions. The support shown for national culture programs was part of the reason that the politicians who attacked and denigrated it began to change their attitudes and supported continuation of the institute despite changing political situations.

The Institute of Puerto Rican Culture's work to defend, preserve, support and disseminate our national culture is obvious and well known. It's enough to recall a list of achievements during the 18 years I had the privilege of directing it:

- The organization of the General Archives of Puerto Rico, directed by Luis Rodríguez Morales.
- Begin a systematic cataloging of historical documents about Puerto Rico in the Spanish Archives.
- Support for archaeological, historical and folklore research.
- Creation of the General Library of Puerto Rico.
- The formation of the best collection of historical and artistic objects gathered in Puerto Rico, rescuing some of these archaeological and artistic objects that had been abroad.
- Restoration of the most important indigenous ceremonial center in the Antilles in Caguana, Utuado.
- Foundation of the Puerto Rico School of Visual Arts.
- Publication of hundreds of books related to diverse aspects of our culture.
- Returning to the people the main Puerto Rican music of the past and present, through recordings, publications and public concerts.
- Preservation and support for Puerto Rican artisans, with fairs and exhibitions of popular art.
- Helping our people have a better understanding of the historical events and distinguished men of our nation, supporting commemorative activities and erecting monuments.
- Establishing Puerto Rican, international and avant garde theater festivals, helping to create a professional theater and an active dramatic group. Program directed with great enthusiasm and dedication by Francisco Arriví.
- Dissemination and support for visual arts through exhibitions such as the Biennial of the Engraving and shows of works by our artists in Puerto Rico and abroad.
- Restoration of some of the main historical monuments on the island.
- Contribution to the preservation and restoration of the historical zones of the island and the restoration of their buildings.
- Opening 15 museums on various examples of Puerto Rican culture.
- Support for institutions and groups dedicated to promoting various examples of our culture.
- Foundation of 76 cultural centers in towns around the island, which sponsor thousands of cultural activities.
- Creation of the first folklore ballet in Puerto Rico - Areyto - directed by Mrs. Irene Mclean.
- Preservation and support for the use of our traditional musical instruments such as the cuatro and the tiple.
- Using an anthropological focus, we exposed society to the racial and cultural roots of our nationality and culture.
- Scholarships and economic assistance to hundreds of artists, musicians, filmmakers, dancers, writers.
- In summary, contributing through many programs and activities to give our people a

better understanding of and appreciation for our history and culture, thus strengthening the national awareness.

In 1973, I came to the decision that I should retire as director of the Institute. I had organized it and had directed it for 18 years under four governors: Luis Muñoz Marín, Roberto Sánchez Vilella, Luis A. Ferré and Rafael Hernández Colón. I thought it was time for another person with new ideas and other perspectives. I sincerely believed that the institution had acquired enough prestige and had been so firmly established in our society that it could not be damaged. Governor Rafael Hernández Colón did not want me to leave public service and asked me to think of another institution that could carry out the functions that the Institute had not been able to do. I remembered our difficulty in being able to integrate the work of the I.P.C. with the University and the Departments of Public Education and Parks and Recreation. Thus arose the idea of the Office of Cultural Affairs. It would have the rank of Secretary in the government and would be attached to La Fortaleza. The objective would be to coordinate the cultural activities of the various departments and agencies of government. I began the office, as always, with a modest budget and only four employees. We were able to put together a plan for Casa Blanca in collaboration with Parks and Recreation, Public Works and the Institute. Later, other projects, such as a School of Gardening, to provide true gardeners for the state government, and a Park Rangers Corps to take care of public parks, were shot down by the bureaucracy. The same happened with the walkways along the Port and along the sea on Muñoz Rivera Avenue, which we had designed and were not done until years later. Frustrated by the inactivity imposed on me by the bureaucracy, I resigned in October, 1976, to enjoy retirement after more than 30 years of public service.

It was then that I helped Dr. Arturo Morales Carrión organize the Puerto Rican Endowment for the Humanities. During my meetings with Dr. Morales Carrión, who was then president of the University, I remember that some years before he had accompanied Luis Muñoz Marín to the Virgin Islands to invite nuclear physicist Robert Oppenheimer to come to Puerto Rico and manage a Center for Advanced Studies in Puerto Rico, which Muñoz, Casals, Jaime Benítez and Dr. Roberto Busó had just created. Mr. Oppenheimer, who was already ill, declined to accept the post, leaving the plan unfulfilled. I was interested in organizing it, and in 1976 I requested an audience with the Higher Education Council, the entity that had created the Center for Advanced Studies in Puerto Rico, to ask them to reactivate the institution, but as an autonomous graduate school, and that the Caribbean be included, in addition to Puerto Rico. Members of the Council, such as Aurelio Tió, Dr. Luis Torres Oliver, Dr. Rafael Arrillaga Torréns and María Arroyo de Colón, supported the idea and named the first Board of Trustees. This consisted of Arturo Morales Carrión, Dr. Torres Oliver, Dr. Concha Meléndez, Mr. Enrique Laguerre, Dr. Francisco López Cruz, D. Fernando Chardón and painter Rafael Ríos Rey. This was the Board that hired me to organize and direct the Center for Advanced Studies in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean.

The Center awards a Master's in Arts degree with a specialization in Puerto Rican and Caribbean Studies. Also, in cooperation with the University of Valladolid, it grants a doctorate in Philosophy and Letters. In 13 years, the Center has graduated some 70 students and a good number of the graduate theses have been published by the Center and by private publishers. The Center not only offers an academic program, but also conducts a research program, produces documentary films and publications, and provides public courses and lectures. We also publish a magazine twice a year. Our library is the only one open to the public in Old San Juan.

The Center today is based in the historic building of the Council Seminary, which was restored for this purpose. We have academic and cultural conferences with various institutions and universities in Mexico, Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, the Canary Islands and Spain.

The Center left its mark on the nation, as many of our graduates occupy positions of importance in our universities and colleges, as well as many cultural centers.

In 1978, after a visit to the campus of the University of Turabo, I was impressed with the environment that reigned there, as well as the faculty and student body, and I proposed to its young rector, my friend Juan M. González Lamela, the creation of a Center for Humanities Studies. The idea was enthusiastically received by the president, my friend José Méndez, and since then he has personally contributed to the popularization of the humanities disciplines and to the organization of a museum and center for humanities research.

I do not want to end this story without talking about the last two projects that now occupy my attention.

One of these is insisting that Puerto Rico should be represented as an Associate Member of UNESCO. UNESCO is a cultural institution and those nations, such as Puerto Rico, that do not have political sovereignty, can be associate members. Associate members have all the rights of the full members, except for the vote. When I began efforts some years ago, opposition again arose and, as is customary, we heard the same political arguments today that we heard with the law making Spanish our official language. It was argued that it is better to be part of the U.S. delegation than to have our own delegation. This is false. We have belonged to the U.S. delegation for many years and we have not seen a single UNESCO cultural project in Puerto Rico. Additionally, the U.S. delegation in UNESCO can only act within the regional group that includes the United States, Europe and the Soviet Union. On the contrary, if Puerto Rico had its own delegation, it would be part of the Latin American group. Some years ago, the United States withdrew from UNESCO. I continue to believe that Puerto Rico should insist on being part of this international cultural institution, which can help us with museum educational programs, libraries and health. Participation in UNESCO would unite us with others in the Spanish Americas and would provide the cultural autonomy we now have only in the field of sports.

The other project I am involved in is to give to Puerto Rico the Museum of the Americas, which will be the main anthropological museum in the Antilles and will present the history of the development of culture in the Americas, starting with aboriginal societies, the discovery and exploration of the Americas, the conquest and colonization, the participation of blacks in American societies, colonial life and the development of nationalities. The permanent halls of the Museum will culminate with a large exhibition of popular arts in the Americas.

The exhibitions will use the most advanced technology in museum management. The Smithsonian Institute will cooperate with us on a great exhibition about the American Environment, the Soviet Union will be responsible for an exhibition on the arrival of mankind to the Americas and Spain will install an exhibition on the Discovery and Exploration of the Americas. A large part of the museum, which will be housed in the historic Ballajá building, is expected to open to the public in October, 1992.

As you can see, we have continued to be active in the defense, preservation, support, enrichment and popularization of our national culture.

This work, in the humanities but also Puerto Rican and patriotic in nature, would not have been possible without the teaching and encouragement of my parents; without the historical examples of so many Puerto Ricans, such as Muñoz Rivera, De Diego, Pedreira, Rafael W. Ramírez, Cruz Monclova, Tomás Blanco, Margot Arce, María Teresa Babín, Salvador Tió, Arturo Morales Carrión and many others who showed the way. Nor can I forget the encouragement offered by my professors, such as Sebastián González García, Gustavo Agrait and Jaime Benítez, as well as the knowledge provided by my anthropology and archaeology professors at Chicago and Harvard. The help and support always offered by Inés Mendoza and Luis Muñoz Marín, as well as the confidence of the other governors during my term at the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, as well as the members of its Board of Directors,

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