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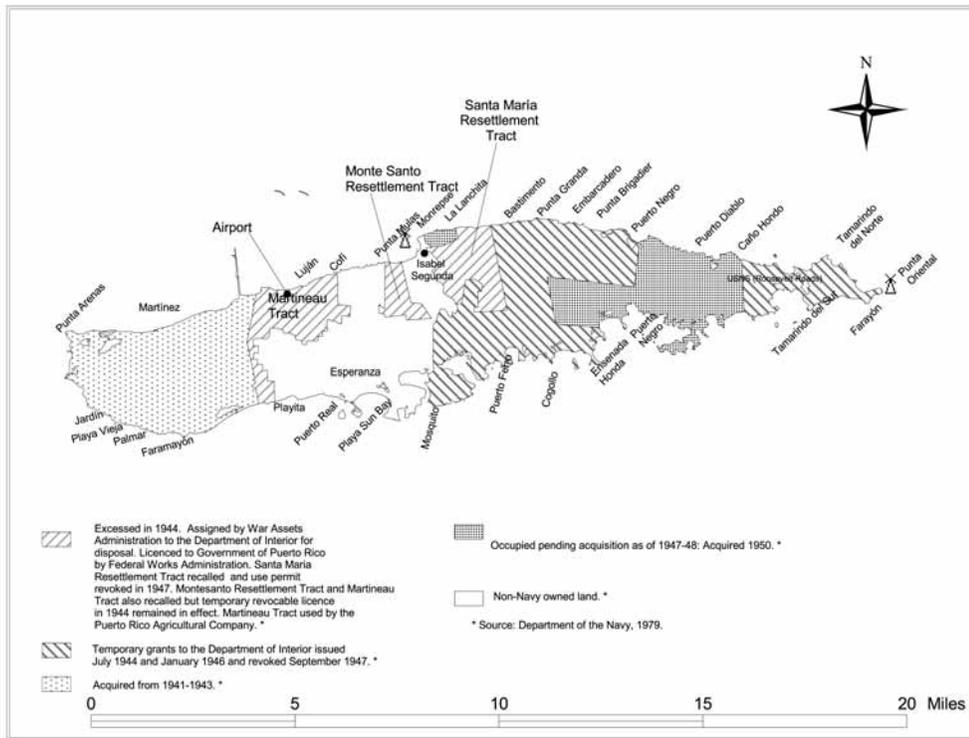
The Cold War and the second expropriations of the Navy in Vieques

CÉSAR AYALA CASÁS AND JOSÉ BOLÍVAR FRESNEDA

ABSTRACT

The 1941 expropriations in Vieques did not seal the military future of the island and did not have to do with target practice. This outcome issued from a second, decisive wave of Navy expropriations in Vieques in 1947–8. The success of this second wave of expropriations linked to the initiation of the Cold War, was hardly predetermined, but rather resulted from a complex interplay between power and negotiation under rapidly changing world conditions. In this process, major forces beyond the Pentagon played an important role: the Island's sugar quota, the project for an elected governor, the economic clout of the Navy presence in Puerto Rico, and local conflicts around large-scale, state-owned economic enterprise in Vieques. After 1948, the agricultural economy of Vieques was practically destroyed, severely constricting the ability of Viequenses to make a living. Periodically, thousands of troops came to Vieques for maneuvers and then left. A new type of service economy serving the troops developed, which provided some income to the commercial sector in Vieques, but deprived Viequenses of other economic opportunities. The impact of the expropriations continued to be felt for the next 55 years, until the withdrawal of the Navy in 2003. [Key words: Vieques, Expropriations, Cold War, Navy, Puerto Rico, Social History]

Imágenes anti-bélicas en la pared del polvorín #401 abandonado por la Marina de Guerra de los Estados Unidos en Vieques, Puerto Rico (Antiwar images on the wall of the abandoned US Navy munitions magazine #401). Rafael Trelles. Reprinted, by permission from Rafael Trelles.



Map 1 *Vieques: Historical land use patterns.* Map by César Ayala Casás. © César Ayala Casás. Reprinted by permission.

In 1941–42,

the U.S. Navy initiated its expropriation of two thirds of the Island, but it was not until 1948 that the U.S. Navy began to use Vieques for target practice.¹ Beginning in 1948, the island of Vieques suffered relentless Navy bombings, which lasted for decades.

During World War II, in fact, Vieques was not used for target practice at all. After the initial rush to build Roosevelt Roads and to connect Vieques to the island of Puerto Rico through what is now known as the Mosquito Pier, the U.S. government ceased construction. The war effort of the Allies during World War II moved to Europe and North Africa, German submarines stopped operating in the Caribbean by 1943, and military interest in the island of Vieques subsided. A Puerto Rican public corporation stepped in to ameliorate the social disaster produced by the expropriations of 1941–42 and by the elimination of the construction jobs which the military contracts had generated. For a number of years after the initial expropriations, the population expected the restoration of the land to private owners and the re-establishment of a sugar mill in Vieques. Things would return to their pre-war state, or so it seemed, at the signing of the peace. It was not clear that the Navy needed Vieques or that it would use it for anything at all.

The decision to use Vieques for target practice belongs not to the Allied effort in World War II, but to an entirely different set of imperatives initiated by the Cold War against the Soviet Union in the aftermath of victory against Germany and Japan. When it became evident that instead of disarmament, the U.S. government was going to pursue a policy of permanent armed competition against the Soviet Union, Vieques returned to the sight of the military as a “necessary” asset in the Caribbean. The U.S. Navy initiated a process to recover from the Puerto Rican public corporation the lands that the latter was using in Vieques for agricultural production

and cattle grazing. The Navy also initiated proceedings against an additional number of private landowners, and relocated a further number of people away from the expropriated zones. Unlike the expropriations of World War II, the expropriations associated with the initiation of the Cold War generated resistance from the Puerto Rican government and from some sectors of the Vieques population.

This paper looks at this second set of expropriations in Vieques, and at the oppositional movement they sparked. The 1941 expropriations in Vieques did not seal the military future of the island and did not have to do with target practice. This outcome issued from a second, decisive wave of Navy expropriations that rolled over Vieques in 1947–8. The success of this second wave was hardly predetermined, but rather resulted from a complex interplay between power and negotiation under rapidly changing world conditions. In this process, major forces beyond the Pentagon influenced the outcome: the island’s sugar quota, the project for an elected governor for the island, the economic clout of the Navy presence in Puerto Rico, and local conflicts around large-scale, state-owned economic enterprise in Vieques. Both the expropriations and the local response they generated are processes separate and distinct from the expropriations of 1941–42. Thus, we designate this second wave of displacement of the Vieques population by the Navy as the “Cold War expropriations.”

The re-militarization of Vieques took place in the context of military, political, and economic uncertainty. On March 1, 1939, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Admiral William D. Leahy returned from the island of Culebra aboard the USS Houston at the conclusion of the important military maneuvers code named Fleet Problem XX. The purpose of these maneuvers was to evaluate the American military defenses in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean, and to develop a military plan for the region. This plan would be implemented by Leahy, as he was offered the governorship of Puerto Rico by Roosevelt during their meeting on the USS Houston. Leahy’s new responsibilities would include overseeing the completion of the military bases: Borinquen Field air force base, the naval base of Roosevelt Roads, and the air force base at Isla Grande (Rodríguez Beruff 2002: 5, 20, 59).

As a consequence of this military plan, in 1941–42, the U.S. Navy expropriated 22,000 of the 33,000 acres of land of the island, causing the closure of the only remaining sugar mill and the largest employer of Vieques—Central Playa Grande. This signaled the final decline of cane agriculture, the principal economic activity of Vieques from the early 1800s until World War II. In addition, 700 families from the western zone of the island were relocated. The trauma of the relocations of the families of rural workers into what became known as the Santa María “slum” (Picó 1943) was buffered by the initiation of construction of a base and pier in Vieques. Construction started in 1942 and ended during the summer of 1943. A total of 2,950 people were employed during this period, of which 1,700 were Viequeses, at salaries averaging \$2.25 a day, which was 40 percent more than the going rate in the cane fields. The population of Vieques increased to 14,000, its highest ever, counting temporary workers from Puerto Rico and continental workers employed in the Navy projects. Despite the expropriations, 1942–43 was a year of relative prosperity. There was full employment in the island, year round, in contrast to the sugar industry, where employment was seasonal.

In March 1943 the president of the Puerto Rican Senate, Luis Muñoz Marín, commissioned a report on conditions in Vieques. Muñoz Marín had advance knowledge that all construction would cease and that the Navy would only be able

to offer jobs to 225 people, leaving 1,475 unemployed. The municipal government was in no position to help, as its meager budget had been reduced by 39 percent as a result of the loss of the base of taxable property on which it had historically depended for revenue. The study was produced by a committee headed by Dr. Rafael Picó, President of the Puerto Rico Planning Board (Picó 1943). In March of 1943, there was “a boom in Vieques such as the Island had not experienced for 100 years.” However, the cessation of military construction, which “will probably arrive by the middle of the summer,” was destined to produce for Vieques “the severest crisis in its history” (Picó 1943: 1). The Picó study of 1943 was meant to address the forthcoming crisis. Its most important recommendation was to request from the Navy a study to determine whether the 13,000 acres expropriated without military restrictions could be transferred to the Interior Department of the United States, which would in turn put the land at the disposal of some agency of the insular government.



Workers demanding the reopening of a sugar mill in Vieques after the closure of Central Playa Grande in the summer of 1943. Archivo de fotos del periódico *El Mundo*, Universidad de Puerto Rico, Recinto de Río Piedras.

In March 1944, almost one year after the report issued by the Picó Commission, the Legislature of Puerto Rico approved laws number 89 and 90, which were designed to alleviate conditions in Vieques. Law number 89 assigned \$500,000 to the Puerto Rico Industrial Development Company (PRIDCO), and Law number 90 assigned an additional \$1,500,000 to the Land Authority. This money was to be used for buying the machinery of the Central Playa Grande, buying machinery in order to operate a distillery, and purchasing the 8,000 acres that previously belonged to the Eastern Sugar Associates, but were expropriated by the Navy in 1941–42. Nothing came of the plans outlined in those laws, however.

In 1945 the Government of Puerto Rico created the Puerto Rico Agricultural Corporation (PRACO), and the funds assigned by the legislature in laws 89 and 90 were transferred to PRACO. With the creation of PRACO, which was established with an initial appropriation of \$12.2 million, the Government of Puerto Rico finally seemed to be doing something to help the economic and social problems in Vieques caused by the expropriations.

Between 1945 and 1948, PRACO was the principal employer in Vieques. It subleased 13,000 acres of land from the Interior Department of the United States, employed about 40 percent of the labor force of Vieques in its pineapple and cattle ranching activities, and invested \$1,900,000. The first expropriations were thus

followed by a period of feverish construction and full employment, and then by a period during which the Puerto Rican public corporation PRACO attempted to reconstitute agricultural activity in the island. The best cane lands in the western part were permanently removed from production after the construction of an ammunition depot, but the eastern lands, which received less rainfall, were still available for cattle ranching. Uncertainty was always hovering above all initiatives in Vieques, as the Navy could at any time request the lands for military use.

In 1947, the Navy announced that it was interested in controlling more than half of the island of Vieques for amphibious training. The Navy revealed its intentions of recovering 13,000 acres previously expropriated and currently under the management of Puerto Rico Agricultural Company. PRACO had a lease on this property, which was owned by the Interior Department of the United States. The terms of this lease stipulated that the Interior Department of the United States could break the lease unilaterally with little prior notification. The lease also documented that the Interior Department of the United States would not assume responsibility for the economic hardship which this clause, when executed, would most likely generate (Picó 1950: 210–3; *El Eco de Vieques* 1947). As a result, the \$1,900,000 million invested by PRACO in Vieques was lost.

The period during which Vieques felt the influence of PRACO lasted only about two years, from the end of 1945 to mid 1947. During this tenure, PRACO had 500 employees by October 1945 (*El Mundo* 1945) and 1,113 by mid-1947. As previously stated, this last figure represented 40 percent of the available workforce on the island. PRACO employed these workers in pineapple production and cattle grazing. In 1947 the Navy announced plans to expropriate another 4,500 acres. Therefore, the 8,000 acres currently under Navy ownership, plus the 13,000 acres it planned to retake from PRACO, and the additional 4,500 acres it planned to expropriate would amount to Navy ownership of 25,500 acres—77 percent of the island. The population of around 10,000 would be forced to live on 23 percent of the remaining land, sharply curtailing their chances for economic prosperity (Picó 1943).²

The Navy battles the government of Puerto Rico

The government of Puerto Rico complained that the economy of Vieques was already in terrible shape and that further takeover of land by the Navy would be disastrous to the islanders. The 1941–42 expropriations reduced the municipality’s budget by 39 percent, from \$52,903 to \$32,557 (Picó 1943).³ Governor Jesús T. Piñero declared to the press that Puerto Rico had a sufficiently high population density, and a problem of overpopulation. This meant that any loss of land currently used productively would be detrimental to the island as a whole. The governor was aware that the Navy was carrying out a study of Vieques for use as an amphibious training site, and he discussed the issue with the Secretary of the Navy, John L. Sullivan. The position of Governor Piñero was that the Navy should keep the lands it was using in western Vieques, but should not acquire any more land (McCabe 1947). The opposition of Piñero to the Navy’s further acquisition of land in Vieques took place in an interesting context: the Resident Commissioner of Puerto Rico in Washington, Antonio Fernós Isern, was lobbying for a bill to allow Puerto Ricans to elect their own governor, and the island needed to renegotiate the sugar quotas that had regulated overproduction in the industry since 1934. Piñero was the last presidentially appointed governor of Puerto Rico, and the only Puerto Rican ever appointed to the post by a U.S. president.⁴

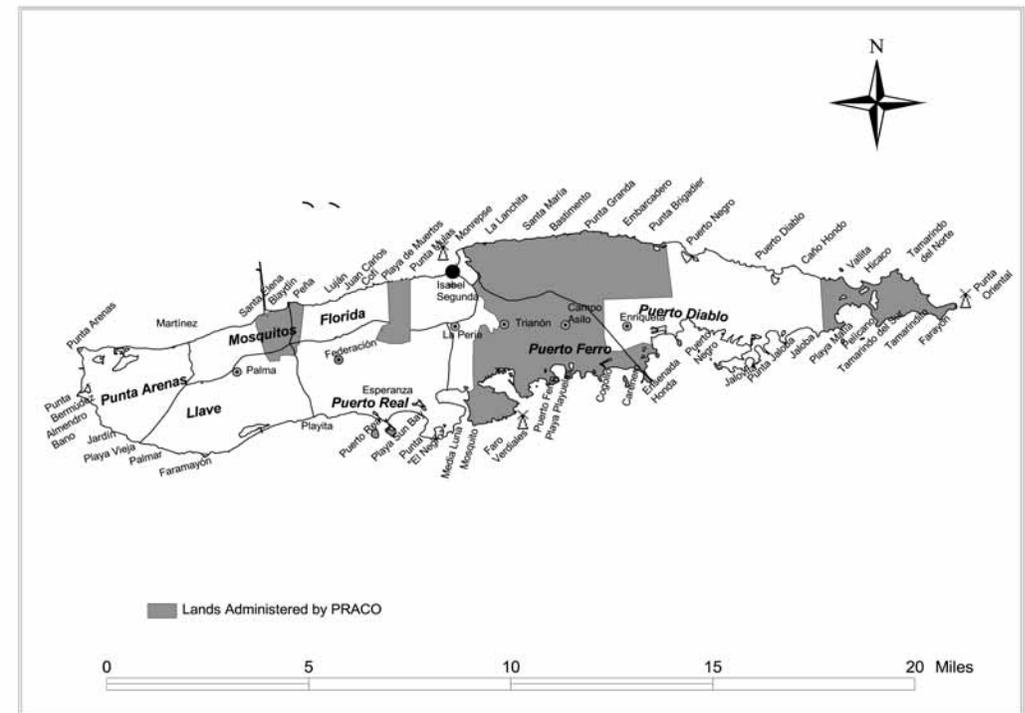
On March 13, 1947 Luis Muñoz Marín, President of the Senate in Puerto Rico, wrote to Julius A. Krug, Secretary of the Interior Department, concerned that the Navy might revoke the lease whereby 13,000 acres previously expropriated were returned to the Government of Puerto Rico. These lands were currently being used for agricultural purposes. Muñoz pleaded with Krug to intervene with the Navy in order to avoid these expropriations unless it was “absolutely necessary to the national security.”⁵

On the 23rd of November, 1947, Vice Admiral Daniel T. Barbey, Governor Jesús T. Piñero, the Executive Director of the Puerto Rican housing authority, César Cordero, and the coordinator for Insular Affairs, Elmer M. Ellsworth, agreed that the Navy would recover the lands loaned to the Interior Department of the United States, and that it would expropriate 4,500 additional acres currently owned by private landowners. In addition, it was agreed that the Housing Authority was authorized to purchase 84 acres to subdivide into lots to be used for relocation of the displaced population. These transfers were to happen as soon as possible so the Navy could commence operations at the beginning of 1948, using the acquired lands plus the 21,000 acres expropriated between 1941 and 1942.⁶

Between June and November 1947, the objections of Governor Jesús T. Piñero were overcome. The Navy’s officials, stationed in the battleship USS Iowa, summoned the governor to a meeting on July 19th (McCabe 1947). The Navy officers did not come to San Juan for the meeting. Instead, the governor was required to board the battleship to discuss the expropriations with the Navy representatives, a clear symbolic representation of the power structure in these negotiations.

In the course of the negotiations the Navy let it be known that it could bring to bear considerable influence over federal policy, and that Puerto Rico was very dependent on these policies for its economic well-being. Piñero was asked about Puerto Rico’s position on the sugar quotas, an issue of major concern to the island’s main export industry. Evidently, he was being reminded that the island’s economy depended on sugar sales to the American market, and that these sugar sales were dependent on a tariff and a sugar quota, both of which were in the hands of the U.S. Congress. Governor Piñero, on the other hand, countered via declarations to the press that Puerto Ricans were in fact barred from joining the U.S. Navy, because there was no recruiting station in the island, but that he was hopeful that the Navy would soon open its doors to Puerto Ricans.⁷ Evidently, Piñero was pointing to the colonial paradox of the Navy wanting the land of a people it was not eager to admit into its own ranks.

Navy Vice Admiral Daniel E. Barbey expressed concern that the opposition of the local government to the proposed training zone could derail the development of an immense naval and military training zone in Vieques, which was projected to allow maneuvers by 25,000 troops. Roosevelt Roads, the naval base in Ensenada Honda in eastern Puerto Rico, which represented an investment of \$90,000,000, was scheduled to reopen, as it had been closed after the end of the Second World War (Langley 1985). Barbey suggested that the Navy’s preference was Vieques, but Guantánamo, Cuba, and an unspecified location in Trinidad were also under consideration. This was arm twisting at its worst. The government of Puerto Rico, on the other hand, expressed disapproval of the idea of relocating entire families from the proposed training zone and having to return land that was owned by the U.S. federal government, but currently used by PRACO.



Map 2 Lands administered by PRACO. Map by César Ayala Casás. © César Ayala Casás. Reprinted by permission.

The Navy and PRACO: Conflicting visions

PRACO was created at a moment of transition in Puerto Rico. The Popular Democratic Party had won the elections of 1940 by a slight margin and proceeded to implement in Puerto Rico a program of agrarian reform. The reform consisted of essentially two components: the distribution of small parcels of land to *agregados*⁸ and the transfer of large landholdings from private corporations to the state, for operation by the state in what were called “proportional profit farms.” The distribution of *parcelas* advanced in the island, and it was defended by the Populares as a measure consistent with the war-effort attempt to make the island self-sufficient in food. Rural families would tend to small plots to produce food, which would diminish the vulnerability of the island in the event of German naval blockade. The Populares successfully presented landowner opposition to this measure as opposition to the war effort, and they proceeded to distribute thousands of *parcelas* to *agregados*. By the end of the war 14,000 families had been resettled in *parcelas* (Edel 1962: 48). This secured for the PPD an electoral base of peasants who either received a *parcela* or expected to receive one from the insular government, and contributed to the party’s sweeping victory in the elections to the Puerto Rican legislature of 1944. While these small parcels of land were not enough for a family to develop commercial agriculture, they contributed to self-sufficiency in food and above all, loosened the hold of the great landowners over the *agregados*. Rural workers and *agregados* before this reform were subject to eviction by the landowners from their own houses, which were built on landlord property. The landowners had used this power in labor disputes and had coerced their *agregados* to vote according to landlord preference in past elections. Thus, for the *agregado* families, the small plot of land signified a significant measure of personal liberty. The political impact of the reform was immense. The economic impact of the reform, however, was only marginal.

The other component of the program were the proportional profit farms. These were operated as large landholdings, almost exclusively in cane agriculture. They thus continued the pattern of monocultural specialization in cane and the structure of concentrated landownership, two features of the Puerto Rican economy that had come under attack during the crisis of the 1930s. In fact, the proportional profit farms suffered from many of the limitations of the corporations they were supposed to replace. According to one acute observer from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, “the Land Authority’s acquisition of land from corporations under the 500-acre limitation has represented little more than a transfer of land from one big owner to the other. And in the process of operating this large holding of land, the Land Authority unwantingly has had to assume many of the characteristics and the problems of the very same corporate entities it was obliged under the law to destroy” (Koenig 1953: 257–8). What was true of the Land Authority in the island of Puerto Rico was also true of PRACO in Vieques. It suffered from the same limitations of bureaucratic government ownership as the Land Authority.

The government of Puerto Rico created PRACO by approving Law #31 of April 24, 1945, in order to promote scientific investigation, industries, and commerce related to agriculture. The corporation was capitalized with \$12.2 million to be received on a yearly basis by means of a budgetary request from the Senate of Puerto Rico. In its first meeting on April 26, 1945, the Board of Directors named Thomas A. Fennell as General Manager. Fennell was a personal friend of Governor Rexford G. Tugwell, and had arrived to Puerto Rico from Haiti, where he had served as consultant to the local Government.⁹

On January 1946 the Navy leased 12,806.7 acres to the Interior Department of the United States. These acres were transferred to the Government of Puerto Rico, which in turn assigned them to PRACO. Later in 1946 PRACO purchased an additional 2,500 acres, which were privately owned, and in 1947 purchased the remaining 1,373 acres from the Eastern Sugar Associates (Picó 1950: 215). PRACO eventually owned or operated a total of 16,679.7 acres in Vieques.

The 1947 purchase of 1,373 acres totaled \$386,500, equivalent to \$281 per acre. This was 32 percent higher than its appraised value of \$191 per acre, and substantially more than the \$53 per acre paid by the Navy during the 1941–42 expropriations (Ayala 2001: 12).¹⁰ Fennell justified the premium prices paid by PRACO, arguing that the going value to PRACO had to be taken into account and that the company’s program had to be implemented as soon as possible.¹¹ The purchases of these lands made PRACO the biggest landowner of the island apart from the Navy, as it controlled through lease or ownership 16,680 acres out of a total of 33,000 — 51 percent of the surface of Vieques. PRACO made substantial investments in Vieques. It purchased cattle and land, and it built structures, investing a total of \$1,900,000 and providing employment to 40 percent of the local workforce (Rodríguez Beruff 2000: 88; Picó 1943).¹²

In 1947, when the Navy announced that it wanted to use Vieques for training exercises, the management of PRACO naturally opposed having to return the lands to the Navy, as this would entail the liquidation of their projects. While no sugar mills remained in Vieques, there were still in the island a considerable number of heads of cattle in the hands of local ranchers, who grazed their cattle in lands PRACO held.

The proposal to revoke the lease between Interior Department of the United and PRACO immediately opened a phase of dispute between the cattle ranchers

and PRACO, on the one hand, and between PRACO and the Navy, on the other hand. Beginning in mid-1947, the battle of the second expropriations began, with the Navy arguing that it would only reopen Roosevelt Roads if it had Vieques, while the government of Puerto Rico opposed the acquisition of further lands in Vieques but expressed optimism at the idea of reopening Roosevelt Roads, which would presumably create employment. Vice Admiral Barbey declared to the press that the reopening of Roosevelt Roads was contingent on the utilization of Vieques as a training ground.¹³ Vieques was sought to host training exercises similar to those practiced in the islands off the coast of California (Carb 1947). Thus, multiple interests were conjured to battle by the Navy’s initiation of the second expropriations. The local Puerto Rican government, under the de facto leadership of Luis Muñoz Marín, was struggling to gain certain “autonomous” rights under the federal government, such as the right to an elected governor and eventually, in 1952, the right of the so-called Commonwealth of Puerto Rico to exist. At the same time, the insular authorities had to renegotiate the sugar quota, which determined the amount of sugar which could enter the United States free of duty. The island’s economy was highly dependent on its sugar exports.¹⁴ Therefore, it was hard pressed to oppose the federal authorities. PRACO faced the opposition of the cattle ranchers, as they were not content with the existing contract between themselves and PRACO. The Navy faced both the opposition of the insular government and the potential opposition of a social movement of the displaced ranchers of Vieques. All of these conflicts were unfolding under the rapidly changing political climate in Washington, which, instead of continuing the expected policy of disarmament, was beginning to rearm for the Cold War in accordance with the Truman Doctrine.

Vice Admiral Barbey laid out the new cold war policies of the United States, as seen by his own branch of the armed forces, at the weekly luncheon meeting of the Lions Club held at the Condado Hotel in San Juan, the 15th of October, 1947. There was “dangerous communist infiltration” in the world. The Atlantic was a possible future theater of conflict. The resurgence of the Communist International, which Barbey erroneously identified as the “Fourth International,” was hindering the progress of the Marshall plan in Europe. The Russians, according to the Admiral, had plans to extend their rule to Western Europe, Africa, and eventually the Western Hemisphere. This delicate situation called for preparation for a “possible attack from overseas.” “We have to be realistic, explained Barbey, “now that the international situation has changed” (Santana 1947).

Barbey expressed his disagreement with those who thought there would be no danger of invasion in the next seven to ten years, adding that this danger required readiness in the Caribbean. He assured his audience that he had received telegrams from many citizens who were supposedly displaced by the Navy in Vieques, and that these citizens were encouraged by the economic prospects of having a Navy base there. The Navy would benefit Vieques economically, but even if both PRACO and the economy of Vieques were affected, “above all else there is the issue of our security in the face of the serious situation which we are living” (Santana 1947).¹⁵

Barbey was well aware that as a result of the 1941–42 expropriations, 1,350 Viequeses lost their jobs — 49 percent of the available work force. In addition, 30 percent of the population lost their houses and their belongings, for which they were not compensated (Picó 1943: 3). A report by the Picó Commission had documented the economically disastrous consequences of the first expropriations.

These findings were public, and they had prompted the insular government to create PRACO in 1945 to alleviate poverty in Vieques. The admiral therefore appealed to issues of national security, and to the importance of the \$15.0 million a year the Navy invested on the island (Santana 1948a). He was fully aware that the additional expropriations would negatively impact the people of Vieques. While expenditure by the armed forces had decreased sharply in Vieques, and the cessation of Naval construction in 1943 had caused a catastrophic decline in employment, in Puerto Rico as a whole expenditures by the armed forces were an important component of the local economy. In 1946, the Navy and the Army spent \$84 million dollars in Puerto Rico, a significant sum in the island's overall economic panorama (Hibben & Picó 1948: 193). The admiral appealed to this larger effect of the armed forces on Puerto Rico, but ultimately it was clear that the Navy's proposed plans for Vieques were the product of larger strategic considerations against which local concerns carried only minor weight. Still, the citizens of Vieques attempted to assert their rights.

Viequenses get involved

Mayor Antonio Ávila of Vieques favored the construction of a base and an increased military presence on the island. The last and most prosperous economic period in the history of Vieques was, after all, precisely during the initial presence of the Navy. According to him, 99 percent of the population of Vieques favored the installation of the naval base as soon as possible (*El Mundo* 1947a). He challenged a group of local citizens who opposed it, the Asociación de Hijos de Vieques, to a public debate on the matter. Germán Rieckehoff, a local landowner, editor of *El Eco de Vieques*, and the President of the Asociación de Hijos de Vieques, called a public meeting in the town plaza and debated the mayor on the issue of the military base. Ávila complained that in the previous four years the two sugar centrales that provided employment to the population had disappeared, and described the inhabitants of Vieques in a "pre-agonic state wandering the streets with black flags looking for employment" (Cruz Cruz 1947). The base would benefit the island economically.

Rieckehoff of the Asociación de Hijos de Vieques claimed he did not necessarily oppose the base, but that Viequenses had to get clear and concrete answers from the Navy about just how the base was supposed to benefit the local economy. If indeed the base was going to benefit the economy of the island, they should support it. If there were no clear signs of economic benefits to the population, Viequenses should oppose it. Rieckehoff, showing those assembled the entire newspaper clipping related to the topic of the base, lamented that there was no article in which the people of Vieques were consulted. The town assembly voted to send a delegation to meet with Vice Admiral Barbey to inquire into the economic consequences of the base (Cruz Cruz 1947). Thus the municipal government of this minute island decided to take on the most powerful Navy in the world.

Late that evening, after the public debate between the mayor and the Asociación de Hijos de Vieques, representatives of the Puerto Rican Communist Party took the stand and spoke of the political consequences of the despoliation of Vieques. They were followed by a student delegation from the University of Puerto Rico who took the stand after the Communist Party (Cruz Cruz 1947).¹⁶ In the press, there were some local expressions in favor of the construction of the base, all based on the current economic plight of Vieques and the assumption that the base was going to remedy that situation (*El Mundo* 1947a).

The expropriation expenses: Who should pay?

At the time that Viequenses were publicly assembling their delegation to meet with Vice Admiral Barbey, the matter of the construction of the base had already been settled. As of October 1, 1947, for example, the press reported that the talks between governor Piñero and the Secretary of the Navy John L. Sullivan were focused not on whether but rather on how to transfer the population that lived in the area to be reacquired by the Navy. In August 1947 a representative of the Department of the Interior had suggested relocating the entire population of Vieques, estimated at 15,000, to St. Croix in the U.S. Virgin Islands.¹⁷ According to the governor, only a third of Vieques would remain open to civilians, and he had questions about how "eleven or twelve thousand inhabitants may end up sandwiched in that narrow strip" (Van Vranken 1947a).¹⁸ The governor wanted the Navy to pay for the expenses of relocating the civilians, but the Navy insisted that the government of Puerto Rico pay for the relocations. Irrespective of the final settlement of that issue, at the time the press reported that "the transfer to the Navy is already settled and the only point under discussion is how to bring it about, especially the issue of the relocation of the families which have to be resettled in another place in Vieques or in Puerto Rico."¹⁹

At issue were the transfer of 150 families out of the area to be occupied by the Navy and the transfer of jurisdiction over that area from the Interior Department of the United States to the Navy. The reassignment of lands to the Navy would entail the cancellation of the leases to PRACO, which was using the land for cattle ranching and pineapple production. The Navy wanted to consolidate its holdings in the eastern zone of Vieques through expropriation of additional lands. This additional purchase was going to affect only six landowners who, according to the press, had already come to terms with the Navy's offer of compensation (Van Vranken 1947a).

The issue of who would pay for the costs of relocation of the families lingered. The Navy insisted that the insular government should bear the costs. Governor Piñero objected to the government of Puerto Rico paying all the cost of relocation and further argued that the Navy should set up a compensation fund to pay the municipal government of Vieques for the loss in property-tax revenue when economic activity ceased after the expropriation of lands. The closure of the sugar mills had reduced the tax revenue of the municipality by 39 percent. Now the forthcoming reductions in cattle ranching and pineapple production threatened to further diminish municipal tax receipts. The government of Puerto Rico had to step in to subsidize the municipality of Vieques in order to keep basic municipal services in operation (Picó 1943: 3-4; Van Vranken 1947b). The Navy, however, flatly rejected Piñero's proposal for compensation of loss of tax revenues (Van Vranken 1947c).

The Navy involvement regarding this issue was limited to providing wood and construction materials to build houses for the 75 families displaced by the expropriations (*El Mundo* 1947c). The Puerto Rican Housing Authority would build the houses on an 80-acre lot, which it acquired close to the town of Isabel Segunda (*El Mundo* 1947c). The Navy insisted on having all families cleared from the land by January 5, 1948, to proceed with maneuvers scheduled for that very same month. This entailed the acquisition of 13,000 acres of land from the Interior Department and the expropriation of 4,500 acres under private ownership as soon as possible. The Government of Puerto Rico acquired land near Isabel Segunda to resettle the 75 families. The roads were to be built by the Government of Puerto Rico with crushed stone, left over from the construction of the Mosquito base, and provided by the Navy. After January 5, 1948, remaining in the cleared zone would become dangerous due to the possibility of aerial bombardments and artillery fire (*El Mundo* 1947b).

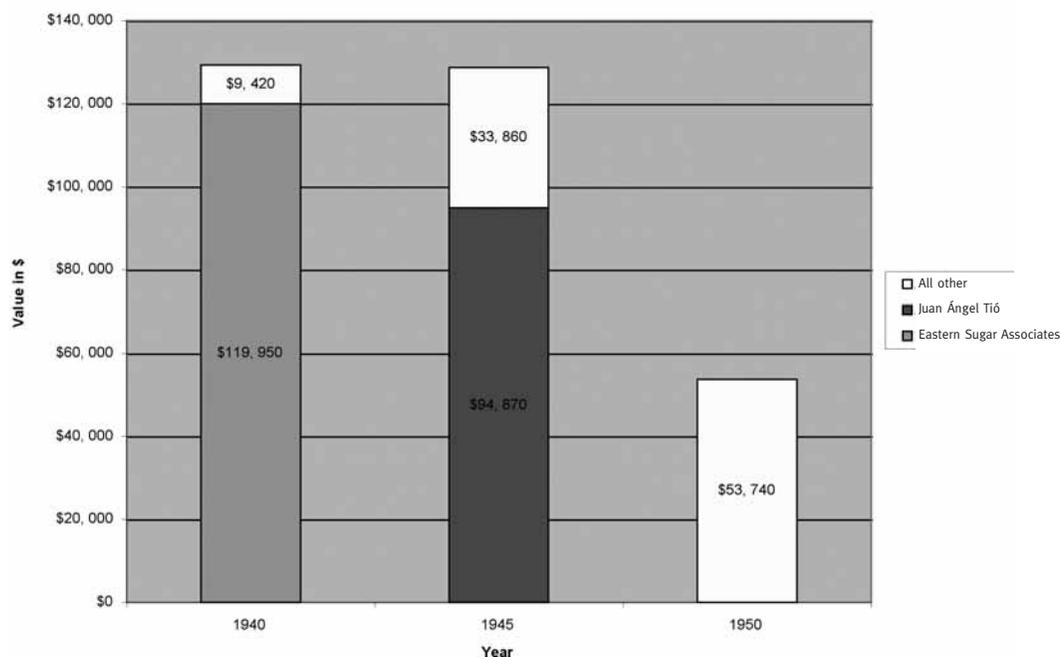
Additional expropriations

On November 21, 1947, the Navy filed a petition in the Federal Court in San Juan requesting possession under lease of an area encompassing 4,370.04 acres of land. The owners would remain proprietors of the lands forcibly leased to the Navy, while the Navy retained the right to sue for full ownership at a later date. The owners of the land were Alberto Biascochea, Ignacio López Colón, Enrique Cayere, Esteban Díaz, Jovito González, Tomás Ramírez, and the Government of Puerto Rico.²⁰ The petition asked the court to determine the amount of compensation to be paid to the property owners of Vieques (Sánchez Cappa 1947). Soon after the filing of this petition, Vice Admiral Daniel E. Barbey announced that other countries would be invited to the military maneuvers in Vieques. During the visit of a Colombian ship to the harbor in San Juan, Barbey took the opportunity to pose for the press with the commander of the ship and to announce that joint maneuvers would take place in Vieques with friendly Latin American nations (Gálvez Maturana 1947).

The cattle ranchers

The U.S. Federal Court in San Juan soon granted the petition of the Navy and PRACO was required to return to the Navy 13,000 acres of land, which it had been using mostly for raising cattle (*El Mundo* 1947d).²¹ The lease between the Interior Department of the United States and PRACO clearly stipulated that the former had the right to terminate the lease without liability. Thus, the fact that the Navy had to go to court to seek an order of eviction indicates that PRACO and the ranchers who grazed their cattle on that land were opposed to the economic displacement that would ensue from the transfer of the land to the Navy. A number of ranchers in Vieques to whom PRACO had leased lands to graze their cattle petitioned the federal court in San Juan to grant them an additional 45 days to remove their cattle from the area. The cattle ranchers, in addition, organized an association, negotiated with PRACO and the Puerto Rican government, and with the Navy.

Figure 1: *Vieques, Ownership of Cattle, 1940–1950*



Source: *Archivo General de Puerto Rico, Departamento de Hacienda, 1940–50. Registros de Tasación sobre la Propiedad, Vieques, 1940, 1945, 1950.*

Table 1: *Vieques, Owners of Cattles, 1940, 1945, 1950*

Year	Last Name	Name	Value of the Cattle	% of Value
1940	Eastern Sugar Associates		119,950	92.7%
	Simons	Miguel	\$5,340	4.1%
	Bermudez	Juan y otros	\$2,230	1.7%
	Brignoni Vda. de Pérez	Rosa	\$800	0.6%
	Cruz Vélez	Eulogio	\$480	0.4%
	Quiñones	Manuel	\$250	0.2%
	Pérez de Rivera	Julia	\$120	0.1%
	González	Tomás	\$100	0.1%
	Lopez Martínez	Ambrosio	\$100	0.1%
		Total for 1940		\$129,370
1945	Tiό	Juan Ángel	\$94,870	73.7%
	Cayere	Simons	\$7,120	5.5%
	Félix	Margaret D.	\$4,890	3.8%
	Ortiz Román Bermúdez	Juan Sucn.	\$3,130	2.4%
	González	Jovito	\$2,910	2.3%
	Aguiar	Federico	\$2,610	2.0%
	Ramírez	Tomás	\$2,390	1.9%
	Sáez	Rafael	\$2,340	1.8%
	Mellado	Manuel	\$1,370	1.1%
	Quiñones de González	Natividad	\$1,060	0.8%
	Tirado	Pablo	\$880	0.7%
	Díaz Felipe	Neris	\$860	0.7%
	Brignoni Vda. de Pérez	Rosa	\$800	0.6%
	Rivera	Severino	\$800	0.6%
	Monell	Aeropagita	\$670	0.5%
	Quiñónez Ayala	Felipo	\$580	0.5%
	Cruz Vélez	Eulogio	\$480	0.4%
	Rivera	Victoriano	\$420	0.3%
	Quiñónez	Manuel	\$250	0.2%
	Pérez de Rivera	Julia	\$120	0.1%
	López Martínez	Ambrosio	\$100	0.1%
	Vélez Rodríguez	Manuel	\$80	0.1%
		Total for 1945		\$128,730
1950	Diaz Sobrino	Esteban	\$12,120	22.6%
	Biascochea & López		\$11,870	22.1%
	Ortiz Acevedo	Román	\$3,980	7.4%
	Cayere	Enrique	\$3,650	6.8%
	Biascochea	Alberto H	\$3,630	6.8%
	López Colón	Ignacio	\$3,000	5.6%
	González	Jovito	\$2,910	5.4%
	Ramírez	Tomás	\$2,390	4.5%
	Saez	Rafael	\$2,340	4.4%
	Aguiar	Federico	\$2,080	3.9%
	Mellado	Manuel	\$1,620	3.0%
	Díaz Felipe	Nerés	\$880	1.6%
	Tirado	Pablo	\$880	1.6%
	Rivera	Severino	\$800	1.5%
	Morell	Aeropagitas	\$670	1.3%
	Rivera	Victoriano	\$370	0.7%
	Quiñones Ayala	Felipe	\$250	0.5%
Pérez de Rivera	Julia	\$120	0.2%	
López Martínez	Ambrosio	\$100	0.2%	
Vélez Rodríguez	Manuel	\$80	0.2%	
	Total for 1950		\$53,740	100.0%

Source: *Archivo General de Puerto Rico, Departamento de Hacienda, 1940–50. Registros de Tasación Sobre la Propiedad, Vieques, 1940, 1945, 1950.*

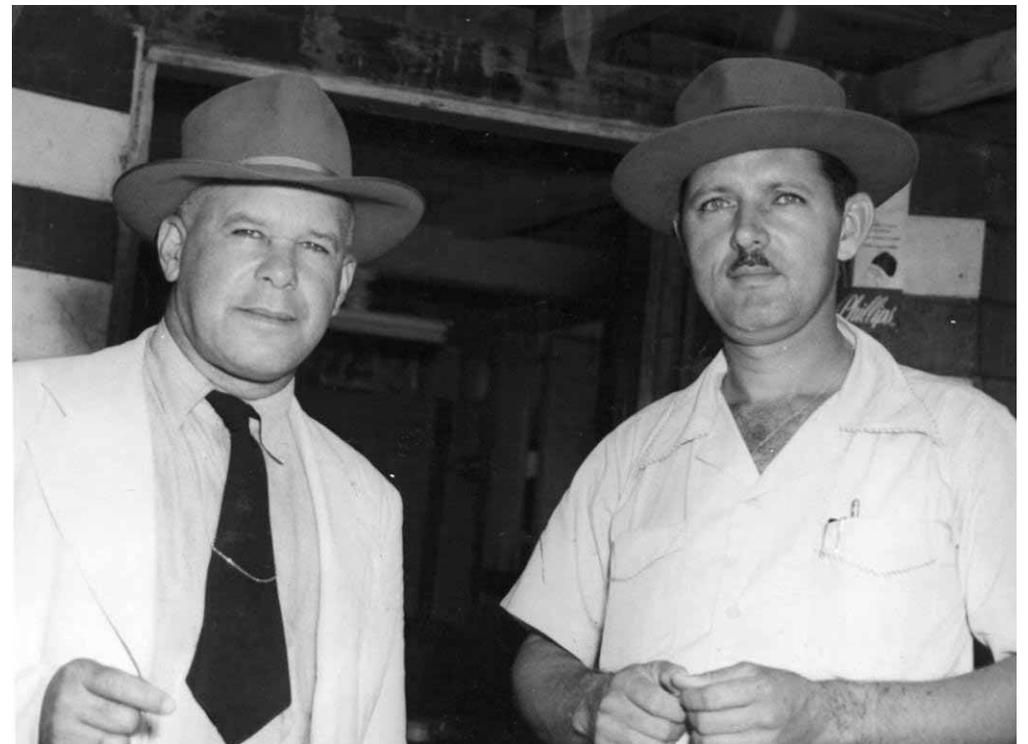
The behavior of the cattle ranchers reflected the gradual but steady erosion of the capacity to make a living in Vieques. The deterioration of economic conditions in Vieques had started during the first expropriations. The principal effect of the first round of expropriation in Vieques in 1941–42 was the dismantling of the last remaining sugar mill in the island, Central Playa Grande. Some cane cultivation lingered after the first expropriations. The cane was shipped by barge to Central Pasto Viejo in Humacao for grinding. Some of the resources previously invested in the sugar industry went into cattle ranching, an activity which continued throughout the war. The number of cattle ranchers in Vieques increased between 1940 and 1945 (see Figure 1), and cattle owners became more numerous. The increase in the number of “ranchers” is probably a reflection of a transition from cane growing into cattle grazing on the part of some of the *colonos*²² of Vieques who were forced to seek alternate ways of making a living after the closure of the sugar mills. It also reflects the sale of cattle by the largest ranching interest in Vieques, the Eastern Sugar Associates, which controlled 93 percent of the total livestock in 1940. In 1945 the largest owner of cattle was Juan Ángel Tió, the former owner of Central Playa Grande, with 74 percent, who presumably bought the cattle from Eastern Sugar Associates with the proceeds from the sale of Playa Grande. Cattle ownership appears a bit more dispersed in 1950.²³ Large landowners divested themselves of some of their holdings. The North American corporation sold to the native sugar baron Tió, and he in turn sold to the cattle ranchers. The risk was transferred to smaller owners as the constriction of the Navy advanced.

The data for cattle ownership do not reflect the many smaller owners who grazed their cattle in Vieques. When they constituted themselves into an association to negotiate with PRACO, the Puerto Rican government, the Navy, and the Federal Court in San Juan, the cattle ranchers, including smaller ones, numbered 175. Although ownership of cattle was concentrated in a few hands, the number of families affected by the decision to establish a base in Vieques in 1947 was not merely a handful of large owners. The spreading of risk to smaller ranchers through the sale of the stock of the large owners increased the number of owners, and thus the number of families affected by the expropriations. The first expropriations “selected” the economic actors of this drama. The large foreign landowner, Eastern Sugar, sold its cattle early after the first expropriations, placing most stock in the hands of a large local landowner, the Tió family. Subsequently this large local landowner sold to a multiplicity of smaller “ranchers.” Thus, by the time the Cold War expropriations began, the “risk” of owning property in Vieques had been transferred to smaller proprietors who could not so easily exit from the scene. They were left fighting for survival in the context of the the new initiative by the Navy to control land in Vieques.

The expropriations of 1947 affected not only PRACO, which had \$1,900,000 invested in Vieques and employed 40 percent of the workforce, but also the cattle ranching interests, who argued that their assets were worth \$300,000.²⁴ In the struggle against the Navy and PRACO, the large owners were able to sell many of their assets to smaller owners and then they rallied the cattle ranchers to their side in their negotiations with the authorities as the area of available land in Vieques shrunk and as grass and water resources became insufficient to support the cattle population of the island.

Paul Edwards—representing Thomas Fennell as General Manager of PRACO—wrote to James P. Davis, director of the Division of Territories and Possessions of the Interior Department of the United States, in December 1947, complaining of the difficulties that PRACO was having with the Navy in trying to obtain land for the 2,500 heads of cattle currently under its care. He also notified Davis that PRACO was preparing the necessary documentation in order to request a court injunction against the Navy.²⁵ The objective of the injunction was to allow PRACO enough time to dispose of the cattle in an orderly fashion. However, as a result of the injunction, the relations between PRACO and the Navy—specifically with Barbey—became strained. The opportunity that PRACO might have had to negotiate with the Navy on friendly terms—if it had ever existed—quickly vanished.

The ranchers, deciding that PRACO’s actions were insufficient and had, so far, showed no signs of success, hired Attorney Benicio Sánchez Castaño, to represent them. The group of ranchers, who owned more than 300 head of cattle each,²⁶ argued that they needed additional time to dispose of their cattle, lest they suffer irreparable damage because there was nowhere else in Vieques to graze them. The Navy asked the court to deny the petition, and brought Colonel J.P. Brown to testify that its first contingent of men for maneuvers was scheduled to arrive in Vieques on January 5, 1948. Brown expected that this first contingent of men would soon be joined by others until the Navy had the requisite number to carry out the maneuvers. Despite this testimony by the Navy, the court granted the ranchers until January 30, 1948 to move their cattle. As to the private landowners, the expropriation for use by the Navy was effective until June 30, 1948, with the stipulation that if the U.S. government did not sue for full ownership by that date, the land would return to its current owners (*El Mundo* 1947e).



Leoncio T. Davis (former mayor of Vieques) and Juan A. Gómez, members of ranchers delegation that met with navy officials in 1948. Archivo de fotos del periódico *El Mundo*, Universidad de Puerto Rico, Recinto de Río Piedras.

Navy vs. PRACO, PRACO vs. Ranchers

The shrinkage of the area previously available to PRACO brought to the fore the issue of what to do with all the heads of cattle grazing in the lands of Vieques. The prevailing agreement was one in which PRACO subleased land from the Interior Department, and in turn allowed ranchers to graze the cattle on their land for a fee. Typically, PRACO was entitled to one half of the increase in weight of the cattle and to one half of all the calves born in its lands. Though it was a government corporation, it was also a large landowner operating for profit, and the ranchers perceived it as the new feudal lord ruling Vieques. Now, in typical paternalistic fashion, PRACO ordered a massive weighing session at its scales in Campaña, where all accounts with the ranchers would be settled. PRACO had plans to take its share of the cattle to the main island of Puerto Rico by barge, but the cattlemen of Vieques, especially the smaller ones, could not so easily dispose of their own cattle. The small ranchers did not show up to weigh their cattle as the corporation had ordered.

The month of January 1948 was supposed to mark the initiation of artillery and naval fire upon Vieques. Instead, in the capital city of San Juan the cattle ranchers of Vieques fired their initial salvos in a battle fought in the court of public opinion. The Asociación de Ganaderos Menores de Vieques, representing the cattle ranchers, took their case to the press and entered into direct negotiations with the Navy. On January 6th, the day after the initial deadline requested by the Navy for takeover of the eastern lands of Vieques, PRACO announced that it would liquidate its accounts with the cattle ranchers. This meant that the company would weigh the cattle and hand over to the ranchers their part, while keeping its share of the cattle, according to the contracts signed with the individual ranchers. The company declared to the press that it had sufficient lands for its own cattle, numbering 1,400, but was not in a position to increase its herd. The return of the land to the Navy, of which 13,000 acres were used for grazing, had forced PRACO to cancel plans for a slaughterhouse in Vieques and to cancel plans for dairy production in the island. The company claimed that the situation of the small owners of cattle was “more difficult,” since they were grazing their herds in an area of 3,000 acres that the Navy had temporarily granted, but that extension of land could only support at most half the number presently grazing. The intentions of PRACO were to take care of its own problems, supporting its own cattle in its remaining land, or even taking some to Puerto Rico by barge, while forcing a liquidation of the cattle of the private ranchers (*El Mundo* 1948a). PRACO declared its intentions publicly to the press after a 3-hour meeting of its board of directors. The meeting was presided by the governor of Puerto Rico, who was himself a large landowner. Previously, he had been president of the Asociación de Colonos the Puerto Rico (Association of Sugar Growers).

Meanwhile, the cattle ranchers of Vieques were meeting directly with the Navy. Juan A. Gómez, representing a group of 193 small ranchers who claimed to own a total of 2,700 heads of cattle valued at \$300,000, met with Vice Admiral Barbey on the 6th of January, 1948 (*El Mundo* 1948b). The delegation was composed of the mayor of Vieques, Antonio Ávila, former mayor Dr. Leoncio T. Davis as spokesperson for the ranchers, and Juan A. Gómez, Pedro Félix, Rafael Sáez, and Federico Aguiar, private ranchers. Present at the meeting were Elmer Ellsworth, representing governor Piñero, and Dr. Carlos E. Muñiz, representing PRACO. The ranchers claimed that PRACO knew about the forthcoming eviction by the Navy since September, but that they were notified by PRACO only on December 31st, not giving them sufficient time to make alternative plans. Davis argued that the

grazing rights were granted by the Navy to PRACO “to help in the rehabilitation of Vieques and not to make excessive profits at our expense.”²⁷ The ranchers opposed PRACO’s claim that they owed the company \$70,000. Vice Admiral Barbey, sensing the deep division between the government of Puerto Rico and PRACO on the one hand, and the ranchers on the other, assured the cattle ranchers that he would solve their problem by allowing them to graze their cattle on Navy land. The ranchers left the meeting very pleased with Barbey (Santana 1948a). They now shifted their aims at PRACO, determined to make the company pay for all the losses caused by the Navy.

The next day PRACO announced that it did not have sufficient lands for its own cattle in Vieques. It would therefore liquidate its accounts with the ranchers “within 48 hours,” take its 50 percent in cattle, not in money, and transport the remaining stock to Puerto Rico (*El Mundo*, 1948b). The company argued that it was trying to be fiscally responsible, that its capital was owned by “the people of Puerto Rico” and that it could not release the cattle ranchers from their contracts, which stipulated liquidation at 50 percent. To do so would entail disposing of the resources of the people of Puerto Rico irresponsibly, in favor of private interests.

On January 10th, PRACO announced that instead of taking its 50 percent in cattle, it would weigh all the cattle in the presence of the individual ranchers and debit the ranchers with the price of the increase in weight belonging to the company. Thus, it would settle in cash with the ranchers (*El Mundo* 1948d). This probably reflected an attempt by PRACO to avoid the cost of transportation of the cattle to the main island of Puerto Rico. Dr. Carlos Muñiz would represent PRACO in the weighing process, which would take place “within a week.” It appeared that PRACO could not carry out the weighing sessions as it had announced. The shift in PRACO’s plans concerning what to do with its own cattle and with that of the ranchers to whom it leased land reflect the corporation’s own erratic attempts to find a way out of the crisis. As the problem of where to graze cattle became more acute and the deadline for transfer of lands to the Navy approached, PRACO pressured the cattle ranchers and attempted to force them to sell their cattle on terms favorable to the corporation. The corporation was clearly unable to elicit the compliance of the cattle ranchers in its calls for weighing and liquidating sessions.

As the negotiations between PRACO and the cattlemen became more difficult due to the common constriction of their resources by the Navy, both parties moved further in the direction of making the other pay for the bulk of the losses. The cattlemen did not want to liquidate under the terms of their contracts with PRACO, as this would probably



Marine officer and cattle rancher. Archivo de fotos del periódico *El Mundo*, Universidad de Puerto Rico, Recinto de Río Piedras.

flood the local market and depress the price. PRACO, on the other hand, needed to hold the cattlemen to the terms of the leases, to avoid massive losses in the operation. The Navy, which had caused this war of desperation between a Puerto Rican public corporation and the cattle ranchers of Vieques, calculated that its best interest would be served by siding with the ranchers against the government of Puerto Rico. After all, the Puerto Rican governor had opposed the acquisition of land by the Navy in Vieques, and any future wrangling in Washington was bound to have more weight than fighting with the local residents of Vieques. Thus, Vice Admiral Barbey came forth with a magnanimous offer to the cattlemen.

In further negotiations with the cattle ranchers, who apparently had nowhere to take their cattle, the Navy agreed to let them use Navy lands in the western part of Vieques, transferred as a loan 150 rolls of barbed wire to build fences, and authorized the ranchers to cut down wood for posts to fence in their cattle in the western zone. The agreement signed by the ranchers and the Navy stipulated that if the fences were not finished by January 15th, the Navy would allow the ranchers to bring their cattle to a farm of approximately 2,000 acres in Santa María, on the periphery of Isabel Segunda. The cattlemen, on their part, agreed to hand over the eastern lands before January 30th, not to build any houses on Navy land, and due to the proximity of their cattle to the Navy's ammunition depot in the western zone, they further agreed that the cattle ranchers and their workmen were to be bound by the rules of the Navy concerning transit in Navy lands (*El Mundo* 1947f & 1947g).

Whereas PRACO operated under the profit principle and charged the cattlemen a rent of 50 percent by weight to graze its cattle, the magnanimous Navy was offering to let the ranchers graze their cattle on its land *for free*. Of course, this was a unilateral agreement in which the Navy had no obligations whatsoever to continue their land services to the ranchers, but, faced with economic ruin, how could the cattlemen of Vieques contemplate refusing the terms offered by Barbey? PRACO, a public corporation of the government of Puerto Rico, was trying to collect \$70,000 or half the cattle from them. The United States Navy was offering free grazing lands for their cattle, and the offer came adorned with free barbed wire and permission to cut posts. The choice was not very hard for the cattlemen to make.

Faced with the looming losses, the cattlemen decided to break their contract with PRACO and refused to liquidate the cattle according to the terms agreed to in writing. The Asociación de Ganaderos Menores argued that PRACO was no longer able to provide them land for grazing cattle, and that this represented a breach of contract that freed the cattle ranchers from the other terms of the agreement. The cattlemen thus refused to show up to weight the cattle and instead hired a lawyer to represent them and elected a leading body to their association: Dr. Leoncio T. Davis as president, Manuel Portela Rivera as vice-president; Juan A. Gómez as secretary; and Justino López as treasurer. The representatives of PRACO argued, to the contrary, that the leases to the ranchers clearly stipulated that in case of cancellation of the lease to PRACO, the company would not be liable to the ranchers for any losses (Santana 1948a). The contract was eventually broken, causing losses of \$39,000 to PRACO—an amount that was never recovered.²⁸



Conclusion

Reality seemed to turn upside down. The Navy, which was the ultimate cause of the constriction of the cattle industry of Vieques, now appeared as the magnanimous savior of the cattle ranchers. The government of Puerto Rico, which had opposed the expropriations, and which footed the bill for the relocations, now appeared as the villain of the story. The public corporation owned by “the people of Puerto Rico” had to absorb the losses of the cattle industry of Vieques. The maneuvers were delayed a bit for the Navy but overall, Vice Admiral Barbey had scored big with the local community. The arrangement with the cattle ranchers achieved the fencing in of the cattle of Vieques, with little expense to the Navy as the ranchers provided the necessary labor. Some time later, in August 1948, during a visit by Governor Piñero to Vieques, in which he met with officers from PRACO, an assembly of 200 ranchers expressed their deep opposition to PRACO reacquiring lands in Vieques (Santana 1948c).

In February 1948, for the first maneuvers in Vieques territory, the Navy brought to the island the 65th Infantry of the U.S. Army, a Puerto Rican force of seasoned veterans from World War II, to participate in joint maneuvers with the Marines. The local press then reported on the excellent work done by the 65th Infantry during the maneuvers. The first reports of the press highlighted a problem which would henceforth plague Vieques residents for decades: the proximity of the explosions and their effect on the civilian population. An immense explosion in Vieques during the maneuvers caused a stir in the town of Isabel Segunda: “The tremendous explosion caused such a great shudder in the surrounding zone and the boom was so strong that many people in the town of Isabel Segunda thought an atomic bomb had been detonated” (Combas Guerra 1948).²⁹

Having defused the alliance between those affected by the expropriations and the insular government, and after three years of maneuvers in which up to 80,000 men had come to Vieques at one time, by 1951 the Navy was in a position to drop its arrangement with the cattle ranchers. It discontinued the arrangement through which the Navy informally allowed the ranchers to graze their lands for free in Navy territory and leased the land to PRACO.³⁰

The arrangement through which the Navy allowed the small cattle ranchers of Vieques to graze their cattle on its land suited the Navy at the moment of the expropriations. The ranchers extricated themselves from payment to PRACO and broke their contracts, and they were able to do so thanks to the Navy offer of free land for grazing. This arrangement came to an end in 1951 when the Navy subleased again to PRACO the grazing lands of western Vieques. Dr. Leoncio Davis, an ex-mayor and the president of the Asociación de Pequeños Ganaderos de Vieques, protested that the lease was offered to PRACO in violation of procedural requirement that the Navy rent the lands after open bidding.

But in 1951, with Vieques secure and after three years of maneuvers, the Navy did not feel pressure to defuse a social movement of medium- and small-size ranchers. The Navy answered through a spokesperson that PRACO had offered a higher sum than the Asociación de Pequeños Ganaderos de Vieques³¹ and that, in any case, the Navy “was not in the business of grazing cattle” and furthermore that it had determined that “temporary agreements with a private association had to be renegotiated with a government agency” (Santana 1951). The Navy paid yearly leases to the private owners of the 4,170 acres of land in the east, and it finally bought the land in 1953 for \$500,000, or \$120 per acre, after litigation (*El Mundo* 1953). PRACO had paid an average of \$281 per acre for land in Vieques. In the first round of expropriation by the Navy in 1941–42, the Navy had paid \$53 an acre. The landowners in this last case obtained a much better price than was originally

offered, after litigation, but not yet half the price obtained by those who had sold to PRACO. Once this last group of landowners was compensated, they were out of the scene, leaving the smallest ranchers of Vieques and the workers with scarce means to continue the battle, drawing little attention from the press and lacking the “notables” and lawyers to fight their battle.

The smallest cattle ranchers and workers who remained in Vieques nevertheless continued to protest the leasing of Navy land to PRACO, which was dissolved, its assets transferred to the Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture and Commerce. But this was a last ditch form of resistance by forces that the Navy could clearly afford to ignore. In Vieques, a new service economy developed. This was essentially the provision of washed clothes, food, drinks and entertainment for the sailors, and an ancillary prostitution industry, the details of which have yet to be reconstructed. Whereas in the old times of the plantation economy workers had suffered the devastating effect of the *tiempo muerto*, which lasted five out of twelve months of the year, in the new service economy the idle season lasted ten months. Maneuvers happened for about two months, then the sailors would leave and a *tiempo muerto* would set in the likes of which Viequenses had never seen—even in the worst times of the plantations. Viequenses had taken to calling the idle season of cane agriculture *la bruja*—the witch. Yet for the new, almost permanent state of unemployment, they had no name.

The process of resistance elicited by the Cold War expropriations tells something about how even in a colonial situation with clearly demarcated divisions between the colonizer and the colonized, the “national” interests of the colonized are refracted through the prism of private property. The spectrum of colors on the other side of the prism shows clearly demarcated boundaries between the different interests. First out of the scene was the Eastern Sugar corporation, which sold its cattle to the Tiós. Second out of the scene were the largest Puerto Rican landowners, the Tiós foremost among them. Last out of the scene were the medium-size ranching interests and the smallest ranchers. The latter had to fight, but even here methods and outcomes differed. The medium-size ranchers—Alberto Biascochea, Enrique Cayere, Esteban Díaz, Jovito González, and Tomás Ramírez—were able to sue the Navy and obtain an increase in the price of their land; additionally, they won extensions of time to be able to sell their cattle under less market duress, and it was they who largely financed the lawyers for the court fights and spoke to the newspapers in the battle for public opinion. The events thus indicate that rather than “national” resistance to the Navy, the division of the “nation” into propertied and propertyless, and the divisions of the propertied by the magnitude of what they owned and the resources available for diverse battles in court and in the press compelled the different “Puerto Rican” interests to deal separately and differently with the Navy. Perhaps no one understood this better than Vice Admiral Barbey. In addition to the divisions among the Viequenses, PRACO, the insular government of Puerto Rico, and the municipality of Vieques, each sought a separate peace with the Navy, and in this they ended frequently at odds with each other. But the U.S. Navy gave no quarter. Neither the people of Vieques nor the government of Puerto Rico achieved a lasting peace with the Navy. Instead, they both had to engage in intermittent struggles against it.

The decisions made during the Cold War expropriations negatively affected the islanders for a number of generations. In February 1948, the bombing exercises on Vieques started and continued for the next 55 years, until a unified movement of Puerto Ricans in Vieques, in the island of Puerto Rico, and in the communities of the Puerto Rican diaspora in the United States achieved the withdrawal of the Navy from that battered Caribbean island in May 2003. Not surprisingly, what unified Puerto Ricans in this latter struggle was not ownership of property in Vieques.

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NOTES

¹ In 1938, Major Christian Frank Schilt, a Marine aviator stationed in Saint Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, asked for and was granted permission by the mayor of Vieques, Dr. Leoncio T. Davis, to use the northeastern section of the Island for maneuvers. As a result, \$10,000 was appropriated to build a landing field (Parkman 1963).

There were maneuvers in Vieques waters, but no firing range for air-to-land or sea-to-land target practice. In February 1938, and again in February 1939, President Roosevelt and Admiral Leahy observed naval maneuvers in the waters near Vieques. In November of 1940 Congress assigned \$35 million for the construction of a base in Vieques (Meléndez López 1989: 28, 32, 47). The Marines had begun designing amphibious landing craft after World War I, and had tested them in the neighboring island of Culebra as early as 1923. Maneuvers in Culebra entailed operations in the coastal waters of Vieques, but, as far as we can discern, no bombings actually took place in Vieques (Hough, Ludwig, and Shaw 1958: 8, 10, 14, 16, 18 n. 21, 23, 29; Garand and Truman 1971: 19; Frank and Shaw 1968: 654, 656).

² A more complete account of the period 1941-1945 can be found in Ayala and Bolívar (2005).

³ Memo from Dr. Leoncio T. Davis, mayor of Vieques, to Vicente Géigel Polanco, President of the Legislative Commission on Municipal Reforms, December 22, 1941, Fundación Luis Muñoz Marín (FLMM), Sección IV, Presidente del Senado, Serie 7, Cartapacio #2669.

⁴ On August 1947 U.S. Congress passed a law authorizing Puerto Ricans to elect their own governor, and in 1948 Puerto Ricans elected Luis Muñoz Marín. The old colonial reality persisted, however, as evidenced by the House Committee Report, which stated: “The changes which would be made by the enactment of H.R. 3309 would not alter Puerto Rico's political or fiscal relationship to the United States. Congress does not surrender any of its constitutional authority to legislate for Puerto Rico or to review insular laws. Neither would this legislation prove an obstacle to a subsequent determination by the Congress of the permanent political questions.” H. Rep. 455, 80th Cong., 1st Sess., 1947 Cong. Code and Administrative News 1588, quoted in Trias Monge (1997).

⁵ Luis Muñoz Marín to Julius A. Krug, Secretary of the Interior, May 13, 1947. FLMM, Serie IV, Presidente del Senado, Serie 2, Sub-serie 1, Fortaleza 4, Departamento del Interior, Cartapacio 13, Documento #13.

⁶ FLMM, Sección V, Gobernador de Puerto Rico, Serie 8, Cartapacio #57.

⁷ There were recruiting stations for the Army on the Island, but not for the Navy.

⁸ Agregados were rural workers who worked for wages during harvest time or whenever necessary while also being allowed to live in the land of their employer, where they often tended small plots of land as a source of subsistence or cash crops under diverse share-cropping arrangements with the landowner.

⁹ FLMM, Sección IV, Presidente del Senado, 1941-1948, Compañía Agrícola de Puerto Rico, Serie 9, Sub-serie 11, Cartapacio #1.

¹⁰ FLMM, Sección IV, Presidente del Senado, Serie 2, Cartapacio #55.

¹¹ FLMM, Sección IV, Presidente del Senado, Serie 14, Cartapacio #28, Documento #1.

¹² FLMM, Sección IV, Presidente del Senado, Serie 2, Cartapacio #55.

¹³ Indeed, when the Navy pulled out of Vieques in 2003, it also closed Roosevelt Roads in eastern Puerto Rico.

- ¹⁴ The sugar quotas were a product of the Great Depression. In 1934 the Jones Costigan Act established a system of sugar quotas for the domestic beet farmers, cane farmers of Louisiana, and for Hawaii, Philippines, and Puerto Rico, in an attempt to overcome overproduction. See Ayala (1999: 239-40).
- ¹⁵ Barbey's words were reported in Spanish and we have re-translated them into English: "Aseguró entonces que la isla se habría de beneficiar grandemente, en el sentido económico, pero que 'si de esos proyectos no se derivara beneficio económico alguno, por encima de todo está la seguridad nuestra frente a la seria situación que vivimos.'"
- ¹⁶ The speakers were Deusdedit Marrero, Juan Santos Rivera, Leonard Schlafer, and Juan Antonio Corretjer. Students from the University of Puerto Rico spoke after the PCP: José A. Benítez, Juan Mari Bras (who was later Secretary General of the Puerto Rican Socialist Party in the 1970s [C.A. & J.B.]), José Gil Lamadrid and José Rodríguez Benítez.
- ¹⁷ "My proposal is that the present population of Vieques be transported and resettled on the Island of St. Croix. As you know, St. Croix is entirely agricultural and very sparsely inhabited. The island could support not only the 15, 000 persons now living in Vieques, but substantially many more from the main island of Puerto Rico. It is already known that the land is suitable for the growing of pineapples and for cattle grazing, and for growing sorghum." Irwin Silverman, Acting Director, Division of Territories and Island Possessions, to Under Secretary Chapman, August 8, 1947. Vieques Historical Archives, Expropiaciones.
- ¹⁸ "Piñero indicó que solamente la tercera parte de Vieques permanecerá abierta a la actividad civil, expresando además, sus dudas de que 'los once o doce mil civiles puedan ser emparedados en esa estrecha faja.'"
- ¹⁹ "En la actualidad el traspaso a la Marina está ya resuelto y sólo se discute en cuanto a la forma de realizarlo, especialmente en lo que atañe a las familias que será necesario instalar en algún otro lugar de Vieques, o en Puerto Rico" (Van Vranken 1947a).
- ²⁰ In addition to the landowners, the petition included a list of owners of houses and house occupants located on these private lands: Gabriel Márquez, Francisco Lebrón and Ramón Ortiz were owners of houses. Esteban Coto, Eleuterio Bermúdez, Pablo García Ventura, Francisco Trufiño, Germán García Ventura, Oliva Solís vda. de González, Leocadio Acosta, Fundador Davis, Eleuterio Encarnación Félix, Gregorio Encarnación, Ramón Alicea, Ramón Conde, and Jorge Santiago were listed as occupants of houses. The government of Puerto Rico was listed in the suit because it owned Cayo Carene (a Key) in Vieques.
- ²¹ FLMM, Sección V, Gobernador de Puerto Rico, Serie 8, Cartapacio #57. The amount of land (13,000 acres) is from Picó (1950: 210-3).
- ²² Colonos were cane farmers who delivered cane to the sugar mills. They could be owners or renters, or they could be family farmers or capitalist farmers hiring many workers.
- ²³ A.G.P.R., D.H., 1940-50. This refers to taxation records that list only cattle. Taxation records that indicate, for example, "trucks, cattle, implements" are not included, because they do not assign a specific value to the cattle apart from the other assets. The Eastern Sugar Associates company was the second largest landowner of Vieques before 1940, and Juan Ángel Tió was the largest landowner and the owner of Central Playa Grande before it was expropriated by the Navy in November, 1941. The records of the properties taxed by the municipal government of Vieques are available for viewing (in Microsoft Excel format) in the following website: <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/soc/faculty/ayala/vieques/>
- ²⁴ The estimated value of the cattle varies immensely, from a high of 300,000 reported by the ranchers to the press when they were seeking compensation from PRACO, to a low of \$128,730 in the tax assessments of 1945.
- ²⁵ FLMM, Sección IV, Presidente del Senado, Serie 2, Cartapacio #17.

- ²⁶ Alberto Biascochea, Enrique Cayere, Esteban Díaz, Jovito González and Tomás Ramírez (*El Mundo* 1947e). These are essentially the same men who were required to lease and then sell 4,370 acres of land to the Navy in eastern Vieques.
- ²⁷ Davis dijo que "los terrenos que ocupa la PRACO fueron cedidos por la Marina para rehabilitar la isla, y no para que dicha compañía acumule ganancias excesivas a costa de nosotros."
- ²⁸ FLMM, Sección IV, Presidente del Senado, Serie 2, Sub-Sección 1, Cartapacio #55.
- ²⁹ "La explosión tremenda ocasionó un gran estremecimiento en la zona a su alrededor y el estampido fue tan fuerte que mucha gente en el pueblo de Isabel Segunda creyó que se había procedido al lanzamiento de una bomba atómica."
- ³⁰ The press continued to report PRACO transactions until 1954, but in fact PRACO formally disappeared. On July 1, 1950, PRACO was transferred to the Puerto Rico Department of Agriculture and Commerce. PRACO's Board of Directors was eliminated. FLMM, Sección IV, Presidente del Senado, Serie 2, Cartapacio #55, AGPR, Oficina del Gobernador, Tarea 96-20, Caja 838.
- ³¹ The leadership of the Asociación de Pequeños Ganaderos de Vieques indicates that it was the same organization previously referred to as Asociación de Ganaderos

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- _____. 1947a. Veterano favorece la toma de Vieques: Dice solo se han quejado los que no son de allí e ignoran sus necesidades. 24 de octubre.
- _____. 1947b. Se llegó a un acuerdo en el caso de Vieques: la Marina y el Gobierno ultimaron ayer un convenio al efecto; esta facilitará el material de las casas; se acelerará adquisición de tierras para iniciar maniobras en mes de enero. 6 de noviembre.

_____. 1947c. Varios envíos de madera hacia isla Vieques: La Marina los efectuó para casas 75 familias esa Isla. Fijan solares. 16 de noviembre.

_____. 1947d. CA tendrá que devolver tierras usa en Vieques: Marina fija término hasta enero 5. Fennell discute el asunto en Washington. 11 de diciembre.

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