

Committee on Resources

Witness Testimony

**REMARKS OF DR. EDGARDO MORALES, PROFESSOR
UNIVERSITY OF PUERTO RICO BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON
RESOURCES, U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ON "THE UNITED STATES-PUERTO RICO POLITICAL STATUS
ACT", H.R. 856
MONDAY, APRIL, 21, 1997
MAYAGÜEZ, PUERTO RICO**

I want to address the issues of identity and culture as they appear in the proposed Status Act under consideration. It is of primary importance that the Bill be clear enough in matters related to our identity and culture so that the electorate can make an informed choice. I believe that in both these counts this Bill has serious failings. It begins with mistaken assumptions about our culture, our history, and our national identity, and is ambiguous about our choices for the future, in particular, in regards to statehood.

The view of statehood expressed in the Bill, can easily be represented as merely a juridical-political relationship between different jurisdictions or states. That is why, statehooders, when addressing this Committee have constantly made reference to citizenship and permanent union as the key elements of statehood. That is, they visualize statehood as a juridical relationship whose common link is US citizenship.

In preparing for this statement, I had the opportunity to re-read historian Bruce Canton's classic trilogy on the Civil War. It was obvious that one of the key factors that made the widespread secessionist movement possible was the idea held by southern secessionists, that one's primary loyalty and identification was with one's state rather than with the union. From this perspective, the Civil War was fought to restore the primacy of the union as juridical-political reality **and** a psychological one. In other words, as country you have concerned for the last 150 years not only with the juridical-political relationships between your states but also with having your citizens place their primary psychological loyalty in the union.

The statehood proclaimed in this Bill is not clear about this, neither are statehood leaders in Puerto Rico. They proclaim a statehood that can promote a state's right to have its citizens place their primary loyalty in the symbols that distinguish them as a separate people.

In our last election the governor appeared in front of a Puerto Rican flag during most of his ads. Old glory was nowhere to be seen. They see no problem in having an Olympic team compete against the United States. You must understand, this is not just an issue that has to do with sports, just as in your country, our Olympic team is a symbol, just as our flag is a symbol and our anthem is a symbol. They represent us as a collective, as a unit, as a nation if you will. Our language is not just a vehicle of communication, it is also a symbol that represents us as a Caribbean and Latin American people, who have a common historical and cultural bond.

The strength of this national identity is such that it resisted and it continues to resist attempts to assimilate us into a "foreign" political and cultural entity. For that is what you are, you are foreigners here. We refer to you as "los americanos" and "los gringos". Your news appear in our news casts under the international news and your national anthem and your flag does not stir the passions of our electorate.

Even statehooders speak of you this way. While many want to remain American citizens, few leaders state publicly that they want to be "Americans".

To dramatize this point, I challenge you to ask them, ask Mr. Romero, ask Mr. Rosselló, ask the proponents of statehood:: What is their country? What is their flag? What is their anthem? Ask them if they are Puertorrican- Americans? Ask them if they are Americans? The most ardent statehooders will be clear, they will answer you unequivocally. Most statehooders will fudge and pontificate. They will refer back to citizenship. They have never been clear in this regard with the Puertorrican people. The truth is that for many, statehood will be a marriage of convenience and not the heart, a legal, loveless relationship, that is fueled by fear of loosing federal funding and free transit rather than a heartfelt commitment to the union.

As to you, you also have a responsibility to your people. For you need to ask yourselves if your are willing to alter the concept of the union, that it will mean negating 150 years of American history and resuscitating a vision of America that was buried in the Civil War. It will also mean proclaiming a vision ,that conceives the union not as a multiethnic society but rather a multinational entity, whose citizens are linked by a juridical-political relationship and a common citizenship, but whose psychological and emotional loyalties are to their own national group and state.

Of course you may choose to go into denial and negation and believe that your are just integrating, a disenfranchised ethnic or cultural minority. But make no mistake, you will accepting in your midst a Latin American nation, with a common history that began before you were even colonized and who has developed its own literature and drama and culture.

You will be accepting a Latin American nationality whose statehood leaders have already proclaimed the right to protect the Spanish language regardless of the mandates established by Congress. **What you should know, is that the same protection given to us under article 10 of the constitution, will allow us, if we so choose and we have already done in the past, to declare Spanish as the official language of the state of Puerto Rico.** As a state we will be cancer on your union, representing and leading the forces that will tear you apart.

That is why the clarity of the choices offered and the implication of these choices are as important for you as for us, for in trying to bring resolution to our own debate you will be debating the issues that matter most to your people: Who are we as people? Who do we want to be? and What bonds us together as a union? Make no mistake, you should know that in attempting to define our future, you will define your own. Pray to God, you do it wisely, for your life as the nation you know depends on it.

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