

Contract Labor and the Origins of Puerto Rican Communities in the United States

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This paper delineates the historicity of the Puerto Rican movement to the mainland United States as a contract labor group, prior to, during and following World War II. The author demonstrates that the communities which developed from this early movement provided the nucleus from which the present Puerto Rican communities arose on the mainland U.S.

Studies that purport to deal with Puerto Ricans in the United States are generally restricted to the Puerto Rican community of New York, largely neglecting Islanders in other mainland cities.¹ Yet, an interesting pattern emerges when one begins to look at the origins of communities outside New York. Whether in Buffalo, New York, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania or Camden, New Jersey in the east; Lorain, Ohio, Gary, Indiana, or Milwaukee, Wisconsin in the midwest; or the settlements in California and in the southwest, the pioneers who established these communities were contract laborers hired to work in the United States. These agricultural and industrial workers provided the base from which sprang the Puerto Rican communities on the mainland.

In the autumn of 1947, the New York daily press started a campaign against the continuing influx of Puerto Ricans into that city. The

¹ See for example one of the more recent and better studies of Puerto Ricans which is Joseph P. Fitzpatrick, *Puerto Rican Americans: The Meaning of Migration to the Mainland*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1971. Although professional scholars have ignored Puerto Ricans outside New York, community groups, especially in the 1950s, came out with several good studies of Puerto Ricans in their localities. See Isham B. Jones, *The Puerto Rican in New Jersey: His Present Status*. New Jersey: State Department of Education, Division Against Discrimination, July 1955; Arthur Siegal, Harold Orlans and Loyal Greer, *Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia: A Study of Their Demographic Characteristics, Problems and Attitudes*. Philadelphia: Commission on Human Relations, 1954; and Robert W. O'Brien, *A Survey of the Puerto Ricans in Lorain, Ohio*. Lorain, Ohio: Neighborhood House Association of Lorain, 1954. For Cleveland see Julio Vivas, Jr., "The Puerto Ricans of Cleveland: A Challenge to Community Organization". Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Western Reserve University, 1951.

government of Puerto Rico commissioned a survey by Columbia University and an investigation by the Department of Labor from which was framed a Statement of Motives on December 5, 1947 with respect to emigration. This statement, among other things, said that the Puerto Rican government "neither encourages nor discourages" migration to the United States or any foreign country. The government did, however, state its obligation to cooperate with municipal agencies in the United States to ease the adjustment of Puerto Ricans who, as American citizens, had every right to migrate to the states. Also, Puerto Ricans who wished to migrate would be guided to those areas where their labor was needed so as not to depress wages.²

While the Puerto Rican government enunciated a policy neither encouraging nor discouraging migration, it still considered migration an effective way of relieving unemployment and overpopulation. Although Puerto Ricans as a group chose the United States as the primary area of resettlement, the government of Puerto Rico over a period of years discussed with officials in Washington and among themselves the feasibility of colonizing Puerto Ricans in Latin America. This interest waned in the post World War II period as agricultural and industrial employment opened up in the United States. Not only would the Puerto Rican government turn its attention to working with mainland employers, but as colonies began to expand in the cities, other Puerto Ricans would make the decision to come to the mainland.³

²For the press campaign against the influx of Puerto Ricans, see Rose Kohn Goldsen, "Puerto Rican Migration to New York City: A Study in the Process of Mass Communication in an Inter-Ethnic Situation". Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 1952. Also see Fernando Sierra Berdecia, "Puerto Rican Emigration: Reality and Public Policy". Paper presented to the Ninth Convention on Social Orientation of Puerto Rico, Hall of General Studies, University of Puerto Rico, December 10, 1955. Pp. 15-17 for the text of the Statement of Motives.

³See Earl Hansen, Research Technician Mississippi Committee to Luis Muñoz Marín, July 17, 1934; Abe Fortas, Under Secretary of the Interior to Rexford G. Tugwell, Governor of Puerto Rico, May 21, 1945; Rexford G. Tugwell to Edwin G. Arnold, Director Division of Territories and Island Possessions, October 18, 1945; Teodoro Moscoso, Jr., General Manager Puerto Rican Development Company to Jack Fahy, Division of Territories and Island Possessions, November 23, 1945 and Moscoso to Abe Fortas, October 15, 1945; The minutes of the Emigration Advisory Committee's meetings for August 4, and 23 and September 11, 1947; Memorandum from Donald J. O'Connor on Puerto Rican emigration to the San Francisco River Valley in Brazil, August 4, 1948. Although Puerto Rican emigration to Latin America was discussed it was not analyzed in terms of voluntary migration but in terms of colonization. Resettlement through colonization proved exorbitant and beyond the means of the Puerto Rican government to carry out although several hundred were actually sent to Cuba and Columbia in the twenties. See Henry A. Hirshberg's memorandum to B.W. Thoron, September 16, 1944 and the preliminary draft of "A Development Plan for Puerto Rico," April, 1943, p. 61. All documents located in Record Group 126, Division of Territories and Island Possessions, National Archives. Copies of all

One individual who saw an opportunity for the Puerto Rican government to encourage migration after World War II was Donald J. O'Connor of the Department of the Interior. O'Connor wrote several letters and proposals on how the government might take advantage of job openings in the states. One was the creation of a migrant labor corporation which would serve the purpose of facilitating the migration of labor. It was his opinion that any money spent to promote emigration would be returned in the form of remittances, lower insular cost in health, relief and public health for those workers who stayed behind and in the educational and work gains made by migrants who returned to Puerto Rico.⁴ Another suggestion made by O'Connor was that the Puerto Rican government should encourage migration for young women of child bearing age. These women would need to be helped financially because they would have less opportunity to save money to come to the mainland. Political repercussions, he felt, could be lessened if the demographic effect of female emigration was made clear only in the privacy of executive session.⁵

O'Connor's proposals aimed at facilitating migration to cities outside New York where "advance-guardsmen" would provide a nucleus which could attract other Puerto Ricans to the mainland. These advance-guardsmen would ease the entry of later arrivals because they would have time to get to know the community. These first arrivals had to be planted "if a large scale job procurement plan [was] to get started."⁶

Nothing major came of O'Connor's suggestions and although the government of Puerto Rico in its Statement of Motives of 1947 stated that its role in the migration process was one of advising potential migrants, it had for a long time facilitated the migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States under a system of contract labor and would continue to do so after 1947. These workers were often the advance-guardsmen who settled in urban communities on the mainland and made it possible for other Puerto Ricans to learn of these cities and leave the Island for the states. Whether it was industrial workers contracted to work in such places as Lorain, Ohio in 1947 and in Gary, Indiana in 1948 or agricultural contract laborers who drifted into cities such as Milwaukee, Wisconsin or Buffalo, New York looking for higher wages, these workers provided the nucleus from which ethnic communities arose on the mainland.

documents cited from the National Archives in Washington are in the possession of the author.

⁴Memorandum from Donald J. O'Connor to Teodoro Moscoso, August 22, 1950, Record Group 126.

⁵Donald J. O'Connor to Manuel A. Perez, Commissioner of Labor, May 13, 1947, Record Group 126.

⁶*Ibid.* April 3, 1947, Record Group 126.

Contract labor and the creation of communities in the United States was not a phenomenon peculiar to Puerto Ricans. The ethnic composition of the South Chicago, Illinois community is a product of labor recruitment by the nationally based steel corporations in that area. The first rolling mills along the Calumet River were constructed and manned by native Americans, Scandinavians and German immigrants. By the end of the nineteenth century the steel mills began to recruit Poles and Slovenes were brought in during the first decade of the twentieth century. During World War I another ethnic group was added to the South Chicago community when the steel mills found it necessary to recruit Mexicans to fill the heavy demand for wartime labor.⁷

The recruiting of labor in Puerto Rico began as early as the United States occupation of the Island after the Spanish-American War. At that time agents from Hawaii came to Puerto Rico to recruit cane field labor. The plantation system introduced into Hawaii in the nineteenth century demanded a dependable labor supply and part of native resistance to conquest was a refusal to work under harsh conditions. As an alternative foreign workers were recruited. The first big wave consisted of Chinese; the second of Japanese; the third of Filipinos and smaller groups of Portuguese and later Puerto Ricans, Koreans, Spaniards and Russians followed. For this trip over a thousand Puerto Ricans were recruited.⁸

In 1926 Puerto Ricans were contracted to cultivate and pick cotton in Arizona. Two trips were made, the first consisting of 480 adults and 96 children and the second of 105 families made up of 581 persons. According to the Arizona Cotton Growers association, the need for Puerto Ricans arose because of the shortage of agricultural workers caused by the tightening of the immigration laws which made recruitment of Mexicans difficult and the prosperity of industrial cities which were attracting potential agricultural laborers.⁹

After the Arizona experience the contract labor system stood in abeyance until World War II. Not only was skilled labor recruited during the conflict, but during late spring and summer of 1944 the War Manpower Commission, in cooperation with the Insular Departments of Labor, Welfare, and Health, facilitated the movement of several thousand unskilled workers for employment with the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, food processing plants and a copper mine.

The subject of using Puerto Ricans for wartime jobs on the mainland

⁷William Kornblum, *Blue Collor Community*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974. Pp. 12-13.

⁸Clarence Senior, *Puerto Rican Emigration*. Rio Piedras: Social Science Research Center of the University of Puerto Rico, 1947. P. 9.

⁹*Ibid.* Pp. 21-22.

was discussed as early as May of 1942. Everett B. Wilson, director of the Puerto Rican Trade Council, wrote to Harold L. Ickes, of the Department of the Interior, concerning the interdepartmental committee consisting of the Departments of State, Justice, Labor and Agriculture which had been convened to consider the importation of Mexicans to alleviate the labor shortage in agriculture in several states. Wilson suggested that the unemployment in Puerto Rico called for the utilization of Puerto Ricans and asked Ickes to help in this project.¹⁰

A year would pass before skilled Puerto Ricans were used in the war effort. One of the major stumbling blocks, according to officials of the War Manpower Commission, was transportation from Puerto Rico to the mainland. The argument was that all ships were being used and could not be released for the transporting of Puerto Rican recruits. While the question of importing Puerto Ricans was being discussed other Caribbean peoples such as Bahamians, Jamaicans and Barbadoans were being brought into the United States to work on key, wartime industries.¹¹ This policy was questioned by some who saw the need to relieve the problems of overcrowding and unemployment in Puerto Rico. In April of 1943 both Harold L. Ickes and Rexford G. Tugwell, Governor of Puerto Rico, wrote letters regarding the importation of foreign labor when Puerto Ricans could have been used. Ickes reminded Claude R. Wickard, Secretary of Agriculture, that for months his department had been urging the War Manpower Commission to make use of the large number of laborers and mechanics who could make an important contribution to relieving manpower shortages not only in agriculture but also in certain building and industrial operations. Puerto Ricans should be used, according to Ickes, "because preference should certainly be given to citizens as against foreigners if laborers are to be brought to the mainland from off-shore localities".¹²

Tugwell's letter to Paul McNutt, Chairman of the War Manpower Commission, also alluded to the fact that Puerto Ricans were being ignored in the war effort. He noted that in response to an earlier letter McNutt had sent a Mr. George F. Cross to Puerto Rico to investigate the feasibility of importing Puerto Rican labor to the United States. Cross had come to the conclusion that a large number of Puerto Ricans could be brought to the mainland. One of his proposals was the creation of a

¹⁰Everett B. Wilson to Harold L. Ickes, May 21, 1942, Record Group 126.

¹¹See Report of the Committee on Territories and Insular Affairs approved December 21, 1943 pursuant to Senate Resolution 21, "A Resolution to Investigate Economic and Social Conditions in Puerto Rico", Chapter 5 "Puerto Rican Labor Emigration to United States", pp. 3-5, Record Group 211, War Manpower Commission Records, National Archives.

¹²Harold L. Ickes to Claude R. Wickard, April 1, 1943, Record Group 126.

Puerto Rican land army which would be in the employ of the government and which could be used for planting, harvesting and other agricultural duties. Tugwell felt that whatever form the emigration might take, he hoped McNutt would be able to take some action soon for the utilization of Puerto Rican labor.¹³

Another individual who became concerned about the use of Puerto Ricans was Senator Dennis Chavez, Chairman of the Committee on Territories and Insular Affairs. In March of 1943 he criticized the importation of 3000 Barbadoans to work in Florida, feeling that Puerto Ricans should have been used. In the summer of 1943, however, Chavez's committee was studying and investigating the actions of all federal agencies operating in Puerto Rico.¹⁴

The increasing pressure brought on the War Manpower Commission finally led to the establishment of a branch of the United States Employment Service in Puerto Rico. Winston Riley, Jr. was sworn in as director. Among the objectives of the office were to furnish limited service to mainland employers with workers who could finance their own way. Riley noted that increasing emphasis would be placed on the recruitment and transportation of industrial and agricultural workers to different parts of the states. While he was in charge of the Vocational Guidance Department of the Puerto Rican Department of Education, Riley had taken the lead in training laborers and arranging transportation to the United States. Under his direction nearly 200 skilled workers had been shipped northward. All the workers had to pay their own way and have enough money for living in the states for two or three weeks. A sufficient command of English was required and each worker was cleared by Navy intelligence.¹⁵

The importation of skilled workers covered a period of about seven months from May to December of 1943. Each person accepted was required to have 100 dollars before he was shipped and only persons with vocational training and six months or more working experience were considered. One thousand and thirty men were sent in small groups under this program. The recruitment of skilled workers was abruptly halted and in the second phase unskilled labor made up the bulk of the men sent to work in the states.¹⁶

The changeover from the recruitment of skilled labor to that of

¹³Rexford G. Tugwell to Paul V. McNutt, April 19, 1943, Record Group 211.

¹⁴Memorandum from William Brophy to Abe Fortas, March 22, 1943, Record Group 126 and Dennis Chavez to Paul V. McNutt, June 5, 1943, Record Group 211.

¹⁵Copy of article in the *San Juan World Journal*, June 26, 1943, Record Group 211.

¹⁶Senior, *Puerto Rican Emigration*, p. 24.

unskilled came about for several reasons. First, there was the inefficiency on the part of those responsible for the importation of skilled workers. The problem involved the inability to find skilled work for all the men in the vicinity of the point of entry. The U.S. Employment Service office serving the vicinity may have had no orders for skilled men or for men with skills possessed by the Puerto Ricans and no funds were available to send these men elsewhere. There was also the inability of regional offices of the War Manpower Commission to route all the men to designated jobs and on arrival some of the Puerto Rican recruits had gone off by themselves or had become stranded. Because of these difficulties the Commission was planning to start again the transportation of workers under a plan whereby they would be assigned to specific jobs before leaving the Island. This was to be accomplished by having the employer send representatives to Puerto Rico to do the hiring or the Commission would do the hiring in behalf of and under the authority of the employer.¹⁷

The second reason that opened the door to Puerto Rican unskilled labor was the problems which arose between the railroads and the Mexican workers imported to do track work. The railroads were accused by the Mexican government of wage discrimination and threatened to have all its nationals repatriated. The government filed a claim of 1,800,000 dollars against the railroads and finally consented to allow a maximum of 20,000 Mexicans to remain in the United States and the War Manpower Commission had been unable to have this ceiling raised.¹⁸

The third and probably most important reason that finally led to the importation of Puerto Rican unskilled labor was the issuance of the report by the Committee on Territories and Insular Possessions. Chapter five pertained to Puerto Rican emigration to the United States. The committee in its report castigated departments concerned with the importation program, especially the War Manpower Commission, for their slow action in light of the fact that thousands of aliens were being brought in. They recommended that every effort be made to employ and move to the United States as many Puerto Ricans as were available and fitted for industrial jobs and also for agricultural and other positions in which they could be utilized. This mass migration should, according to the committee, be undertaken at government expense and all precautions taken to safeguard the life and welfare of the Puerto Ricans. The report

¹⁷Memorandum from Gilbert Ramirez on "Present Status of Migration of Puerto Rican Workers", December 21, 1943, Record Group 126.

¹⁸Memorandum from Gilbert Ramirez on "Importation of Puerto Ricans", February 18, 1943, Record Group 126.

ended by stating that “‘full speed ahead’ is our indication to the War Manpower Commission and we hope they will heed our advice’”.¹⁹

Procrastination, as pointed out by the Chavez Committee, was a major obstacle to the recruitment of Puerto Ricans. Some of the reasons given by officials in Washington and producers, especially in agriculture, point to the failure of forty years of United States occupation in Puerto Rico. It was noted that farmers preferred English-speaking West Indians to Puerto Ricans because of the language difficulty. There were also complaints that Puerto Ricans were lazy and undernourished and could not be counted upon to do war related work. In some quarters a fear arose that because Puerto Ricans were American citizens they could not be deported while Mexicans, Bahamanians and Jamaicans could. After forty years of colonization, Puerto Ricans were still considered second class citizens and, as the deportation issue shows, citizenship did not mean free access to mainland jobs during the war.²⁰

The complaints about Puerto Rican workers were aggravated by the 1926 Arizona importation which had cast a bad light on Puerto Rican contract workers. The rumors about the failure of this experiment had reached both the War Food Administration and the War Manpower Commission; responsibility for the failure being put on the shoulders of the Puerto Ricans.²¹ In reality the Arizona Cotton Growers Association was responsible for many of the complaints raised about this episode. Dissatisfaction started spreading shortly after the first group arrived in Arizona. The workers claimed that the tents and adobe and lumber shacks in which they were housed were unlivable. It was reported that they had been shown motion pictures of comfortable houses with both rooms and other modern facilities. The complaints also included the charge that they could not live on the 1 and $\frac{1}{4}$ to 1 and $\frac{1}{2}$ cents per pound of cotton picked and that they had been promised two dollars a day. They were also working ten to sixteen hours a day instead of the eight they had expected. Soon the Phoenix labor unions and state welfare department were feeding and housing many of those who had supposedly deserted their work.²²

¹⁹Report of the Committee on Territories and Insular Affairs approved December 21, 1943 pursuant to Senate Resolution 21, “A Resolution to Investigate Economic and Social Conditions in Puerto Rico”, Chapter 5 “Puerto Rican Labor Emigration to United States”, Record Group 211.

²⁰See *Ibid.* Pp. 5,6. Also see Memorandum from Mason Barr to Rexford G. Tugwell, April 28, 1944. Copy of article from *Washington Post*, April, 19, 1944 and B.W. Thoron to Tugwell, April 22, 1944, Record Group 126.

²¹B.W. Thoron to Rexford G. Tugwell, April 22, 1944 and Mason Barr to Tugwell, April 28, 1944, Record Group 126.

²²Senior, *Puerto Rican Emigration*, P. 22.

The recruitment of unskilled workers finally got under way on May 9, 1944 when 858 workers arrived on the mainland. They were distributed as follows: 758 for the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad of Baltimore, Maryland. These workers were usually assigned in groups of sixty to work in camps in Salamanca, New York; Eddystone and Glenwood, Pennsylvania; Aiken, Lakeland, Joppa, Savage, Baltimore and Singerly, Maryland; Miller and Syracuse, Indiana; and Fostoria, Tiffen, Greenwich, Lester, Medina, Newton Falls, Ravenna, Sterling and Struthers, Ohio. The Edgar F. Hurff Company of Swedesboro, New Jersey received the remaining one hundred of these first recruits. On June 5, 1944, 680 Puerto Ricans were distributed between the B and O Railroad (280), the Campbell Soup Company of Camden, New Jersey (200) and the Utah Copper Company of Bingham, Utah (200). The final boatload of 615 arrived during July; 300 of whom went to work for the Campbell Soup Company and 315 destined for the Edgar F. Hurff Company.²³

Under this program initiated in 1944, the War Manpower Commission facilitated the recruitment and selection of Puerto Ricans through its local office in San Juan and secured shipping space for their transportation. The employer advanced the cost of transportation to the worker and the cost was to be deducted from his earnings. Any worker who completed his contract period was to be provided with full return transportation to the Island. The Commission was not a party to the work contracts nor did it underwrite any of the contract provisions, this being agreed upon by the Puerto Rican government and the employers.²⁴

According to the Commission, this program was unsuccessful because approximately 60 percent of the workers left their contract employment prior to expiration, 25 percent completed their contracts and only 15 percent returned to Puerto Rico. When the Commission appeared before the House and Senate Appropriations Committees seeking funds to provide for the migration of workers during the 1945 fiscal year, members of both committees expressed their opposition to the use of any funds which might be approved for transportation of Puerto Ricans. The fear among some congressmen was probably that Puerto Ricans could not be

²³Memorandum from George W. Cross, Acting Director Bureau of Placement WMC, to Regional Manpower Directors, Regions II, III, IV, V, VI, XI on "Immigration of Puerto Rican Workers", June 30, 1944, Record Group 211. Due to previous commitments several hundred workers were recruited and cleared in August of 1944. See *45th Annual Report of the Governor of Puerto Rico*, p. 70. See *El Mundo* (San Juan), April 15, 1944 for advertisements regarding contract work for the B&O Railroad and for the Campbell Soup and Edgar F. Hurff companies.

²⁴Untitled Report of the War Manpower Commission on Contract Labor during the war, pp. 6-7, Record Group 211.

deported and the majority were not returning to the Island or finishing their contract periods. The wording of the law appropriating monies precluded the importation of citizens. It stated in part: "to enable the War Manpower Commission to provide in accordance with regulations prescribed by the Chairman of said Commission, for the temporary migration of workers from foreign countries within the Western Hemisphere. . . ." As a result of this legislation the importation of Puerto Ricans was discontinued and the branch office of the United States Employment Service in San Juan turned its attention to the service of veterans.²⁵

The War Manpower Commission blamed the Puerto Ricans for the failure of the unskilled labor recruitment program but blame must be shared by the companies that recruited the workers, especially the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad. In June a representative of the War Manpower Commission visited several camps where Puerto Ricans were housed. He found that the men were dissatisfied, their chief complaint being the kind, quality and mode of cooking the food. They also voiced their objection to inadequate and soiled bedding, high prices at the canteen, deductions from wages, lack of medical service, lack of recreation and the lack of cleanliness in the camps. After his visit, the representative felt that more than ever the Insular government should appoint an individual to visit the camps in behalf of the employees. The *Youngstown Vindicator* (June 13, 1944) also brought out the poor conditions in the camps. It gave details of rotton meat served the Puerto Ricans in the Struthers, Ohio camp and reported that fourteen of the fifty-five workers had left their employment. Overall the B and O reported that 250 Puerto Ricans had "deserted" their jobs a few weeks after the start of work.²⁶

After World War II the contracting of workers continued. Recruiters, working for mainland employers, came to the Island and plane loads of

²⁵ *Ibid.* Pp. 7-8. The Puerto Rican office was closed on June 30, 1944. See memorandum from Vernon E. McGee to Alvin M. Rucker, June 8, 1944, Record Group 211.

²⁶ Memorandum from Gilbert Ramirez on "Puerto Ricans Working for the B&O Railroad", June 8, 1944, Record Group 126. There were also reports of Puerto Ricans being mistreated by the Utah Copper Company of Bingham, Utah. See Paul V. McNutt to Vito Marcantonio, House of Representatives, June 16, 1945, Record Group 211. Also note Senior, *Puerto Rican Emigration*, p. 25. The plight of one B&O worker clearly illustrates the carelessness of the railroad with regard to its contract workers. On November 3, 1944 a worker for the International Institute of Gary, Indiana visited the police station of that city after an anonymous caller informed her that a man was being held. This individual had escaped from Mercy Hospital where he had been held for three months. He was picked up by the police dressed in night attire. The International Institute worker learned that this man was a contract worker for the B&O Railroad. The railway contacted the International Institute and informed them that not only was the individual to be returned to the island on November 12 but also that their Engineering Department would handle the matter and that the services of the immigrant service organization would no longer be needed. But on November 15 the

workers left for cities and states outside New York. Many of these agents turned out to be unscrupulous, taking workers where they were not needed, charging a fee to both the employer and the employee and sometimes selling such necessary items as suitcases, clothing and other merchandise. Besides recruiters, another abuse was that of using false promises of jobs as bait for the sale of airline tickets. Act No. 212 was approved by the legislature and declared all agencies engaged in the sale of air and water transportation tickets as public service companies and placed them under the jurisdiction of the Public Service Commission of Puerto Rico.²⁷

The recruitment of several hundred Puerto Rican men and women for domestic and foundry work in Chicago created a storm of controversy. By the middle of 1946 a private Chicago Employment Agency, Castle, Barton, and Associates, in agreement with the Insular Department of Labor, established an office on the Island for the purpose of recruiting migrant workers for the Chicago area. Two types of work were offered: general household service and unskilled foundry work. The employment agency offered contracts which guaranteed a full year of work.

In a report issued in November of 1946 the problems of the workers contracted for work in Chicago were brought out. The Department of Labor did not require proof of age and several of the girls were under sixteen. Many of the workers were allowed to leave without health certificates and some were later returned after failing to pass health examinations given by the Chicago Hardware Foundry Company. The report noted that the Department of Labor undertook no responsibility for supervising conditions under the contracts. The Commissioner of Labor visited the men at the Chicago Hardware Foundry Company and was aware of the conditions there. When forty-six of the men wrote to him complaining of the conditions, he replied that they had entered into the contracts voluntarily and that the Department of Labor would take action only in cases of explicit violation of the contracts.

The workers were transported to Chicago in cargo planes. They were charged \$150 for the trip and \$60 for agency fees. The girls were charged half this amount, with the remainder being paid by the employer. The regular passage rate from San Juan to Chicago at that time was \$131.80 and no tax was paid if the tickets were purchased in Puerto Rico. The workers were allowed only twenty pounds of luggage while on regular passenger flights fifty-five pounds were allowed.

same worker from the International Institute, while down at the police station on another matter, learned that the Puerto Rican contract worker was still being held. Nothing further was said about this individual. See *International Institute Files* in Gary, Indiana.

²⁷*Annual Report of the Commissioner of Labor, 1947-48, p. 48.*

The contract provided that the girls receive \$60 per month as well as room and board. From this was deducted \$10 per month to pay for the girl's share of the trip from Puerto Rico and \$8.33 toward the return trip. The wages paid the girls was substantially below the prevailing wage for similar work in Chicago. No limitations were set in the contract for hours to be worked and some girls complained of working at least fifteen hours per day. The agency would transfer girls from one employer to another without explanation and sometimes with less than a day's notice. At least eighteen girls at the time of the report were unable to continue under these conditions and had broken their contracts and left their employer.

The foundry workers received \$.88 per ½ hour with time and a half for overtime over forty hours a week. This was the rate established for common labor by the contract between the Chicago Hardware Foundry Company and the United Steelworkers of America. After the many deductions, though, a standard paycheck of \$35.40 would shrink for some of the workers down to one dollar for a week's work.

The men were housed in four old passenger coaches on company property. Three of the coaches were wooden and were heated by coal stoves placed six inches from uninsulated walls. Two lightweight blankets were provided for each man and most of the men lacked warm clothing. When the men first arrived their food consisted of cornflakes and milk for breakfast, soup and three slices of bread for lunch and three slices of bread for dinner. A one day strike protesting the food resulted in some improvements. Men who were injured or ill were charged for their full living expenses and one man who injured his back was hospitalized for seven days and informed later that his hospital bills amounted to one hundred dollars and would be deducted from his wages. The case was investigated by the United Steelworkers of America to determine whether the Illinois Workmen's Compensation Act had been violated.²⁸

The condition of the Chicago workers was carried in the Puerto Rican newspapers. There were charges of mistreatment from some quarters and justification from the recruiting agency. Senator Vicente Géigal Polanco went to Chicago at the behest of Muñoz Marín, then President of the Puerto Rican Senate, to get a first hand account of this episode. As a result, legislation was drafted which tried to curb the worst abuses of the contract labor system.²⁹

²⁸ "Preliminary Report on Puerto Rican Workers in Chicago", November 25, 1946, Record Group 126.

²⁹ *El Mundo* (San Juan), December 19, 27, 31, 1946 and January 4, 15, 18, 23, 24, 25, 28 and February 9, 1947. On the legislation see Act No. 89 approved May 9, 1947, *Laws of Puerto Rico* (1947).

The failure of the Chicago experiment points to the inadequacy of supervision by the Labor Department in Puerto Rico with regard to contract labor. For most of the period under which contract labor was carried out there were laws on the books relating to the conditions under which the workers were to be recruited, their treatment and the responsibility of the government. The first law, passed in 1919, was amended in 1936 and both were superseded by the law passed in 1947 as a result of the problems encountered by the Chicago workers. All these laws, particularly the first two, were weak in nature, providing for minimal fines for abuses and giving the Insular government little power to intervene in behalf of the workers.³⁰

Beside the recruitment of industrial and domestic workers after the war, the contracting of agricultural workers was greatly expanded. The first group of workers went to New Jersey, and later workers were brought to such states as Pennsylvania, New York, Massachusetts, Delaware, Indiana, Minnesota, Michigan, Wisconsin and Washington.³¹ The introduction of agricultural workers to the midwest came about because the Chicago office of The Migration Division interested employers in this area in employing Puerto Ricans.³²

Contract labor then is almost as old as the occupation of Puerto Rico by the United States. For the study of Puerto Rican communities in the United States its importance lies in the fact that it was through the contract labor system that Puerto Ricans were made aware of opportunities in urban areas outside New York. In most instances they were the advance-guardsmen called for by Donald J. O'Connor in 1947.

The Hawaiian recruitment in the early part of the century resulted in the creation of Puerto Rican enclaves in California, the second largest state for Puerto Rican settlement from 1910 to 1950. The trip by boat from Puerto Rico to the mainland and then by train to the west coast took away the desire of many Puerto Ricans to continue their journey to Hawaii. To those who stayed in California were added those who went to Hawaii and then returned to settle in urban centers such as San Francisco, Los Angeles and Oakland, and on farms.³³ Similarly, the scattered groups of

³⁰ Acts No. 19, 54, 89. *Laws of Puerto Rico*, 1919, 1936 and 1947.

³¹ *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Labor*, 1950-51, p. 43.

³² *Ibid.* 1947-48, p. 53.

³³ Clarence Senior, *The Puerto Ricans: Strangers—Then Neighbors*. Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961. P. 86; and his "Patterns of Puerto Rican Dispersion in the United States", *Social Problems*, 2 (93). Oct., 1954. P. 95; and with Donald O. Watkins, "Towards a Balance Sheet of Puerto Rican Migration". In *Status of Puerto Rico: Selected Background Studies for the United States—Puerto Rico Commission on the Status of Puerto Rico*. Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1966. Pp. 715-16.

Puerto Ricans in the southwest were due to the largely unsuccessful recruitment of workers for the cotton fields of Arizona in 1926.³⁴

The contracting of workers during the war years also led to the formation of Puerto Rican settlements in several cities. Not only were Islanders found working in twenty of the forty-eight states, showing the extent of their geographic distribution, but data on the municipality from which the recruits came shows that almost all areas of the Island were represented giving individuals from different parts of the Island their first look at the mainland. All but 9 of the 77 municipalities were represented by at least one recruit and only two had as much as 8 percent of the total. The six most heavily urban municipalities supplied their proportion of recruits in keeping with their percentage of the total population (31.3).³⁵

As American citizens, Puerto Ricans could not be returned to the Island after their contracts expired and many took the opportunity to stay on the mainland. Of several thousand unskilled workers reported by the War Manpower Commission, only fifteen percent actually returned to Puerto Rico even though twenty-five percent completed their contracts while approximately sixty percent left their employment before the expiration of the contract period.³⁶

The unskilled were concentrated in six states: New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Maryland and Indiana.³⁷ The first few founders of the Puerto Rican community in places such as Camden, New Jersey were laborers contracted by the Campbell Soup Company. Of the original workers contracted during the war, sixty-five were still with the company in 1961. The Camden recruitment program also provided Philadelphia with some of its earliest settlers. These workers who made the trek to Philadelphia from Camden viewed the former city as providing better economic opportunities.³⁸

After the war the seasonal farm labor system not only augmented already small Puerto Rican communities but in some instances created communities of Puerto Ricans. Two studies done in the 1950s found that not only did Puerto Rican farm workers prefer industrial employment but many stayed on in the states after leaving farm employment. In Pennsylvania fully 89 percent of Puerto Ricans interviewed would have liked to have worked in industry. The two main reasons given were higher wages

³⁴Senior and Watkins, "Towards a Balance Sheet of Puerto Rican Migration", p. 716.

³⁵Senior, *Puerto Rican Emigration*, p. 36.

³⁶Untitled Report of the War Manpower Commission on Contract Labor during the war, p. 7, Record Group 211.

³⁷Memorandum from George W. Cross to Regional Manpower Directors, Regions II, III, IV, V, VI, XI on "Immigration of Puerto Rican Workers", June 30, 1944, Record Group 211.

³⁸Joan Dee Koss, "Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia: Migration and Accommodation". Unpublished Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1965. P. 64.

and steadier employment. Some of the Puerto Ricans interviewed in one Pennsylvania county even asked the interviewer to help them get jobs in industry.³⁹ In New Jersey 537 workers were asked their destination upon leaving the farms. Only 123 were going back to Puerto Rico while 160 were either going back to camp or to other farms. The rest were planning to stay in the states with the highest number going to New York City (89) and to industry (68). Of those who mentioned specific states, 12 of the 48 states were represented. The farm labor system becomes a stepping stone to residence in the United States usually in urban areas.⁴⁰

Besides augmenting communities, the seasonal farm labor system has been responsible for the creation of Puerto Rican settlements in other cities. In the summers of 1951 and 1952, labor shortages occurred in Buffalo, New York. A farm labor camp only thirty miles away became a recruiting area for the industrial employers of the city. Something similar happened in eastern Pennsylvania in industrial areas such as Allentown, Bethlehem and Reading and in southern New Jersey towns and cities.⁴¹

The first migrants to come to Milwaukee, Wisconsin were contract agricultural workers. These Puerto Ricans had been brought to Michigan to harvest field crops. A large number went to Chicago and from there some came to Milwaukee. They found employment in the boom year of 1950 mainly in the foundries and tanneries. These first workers were satisfactory and a number of employers inquired about getting more. Recruitment was conducted in the Chicago office of the Puerto Rican Migration Division. Some Puerto Ricans were encouraged to come from Lorain, Ohio to Milwaukee. On April 26, 1951 arrangements were made by the employment service for recruitment of 100 workers in Puerto Rico for Grede Foundries, Inc. and an initial group of ten was sent.⁴²

Gary, Indiana on the shore of Lake Michigan graphically illustrates the creation of a Puerto Rican community through the contract labor system. Gary was founded in 1906 as a company town—the largest ever built. When the United States Steel Corporation decided to build a new plant in Indiana it also decided to create a city to house the employees. In

³⁹Morrison Handsaker, *Seasonal Farm Labor in Pennsylvania*. Easton, Pa.: Lafayette College, 1953. Pp. 2, 58, 58n.

⁴⁰Jones, *The Puerto Rican in New Jersey*, pp. 20-21. A long time student of Puerto Rican emigration, Clarence Senior, notes that the proportion of workers returning to Puerto Rico in the fall varies with the fluctuations of labor demand in urban areas near farms on which Puerto Ricans are used during the growing and harvesting seasons. Once rural workers are settled in the states on a year round basis the family intelligence service in the form of letters operate to bring other family members and neighbors if work becomes available. See Senior and Watkins, "Towards a Balance Sheet of Puerto Rican Migration", p. 716.

⁴¹Senior and Watkins, "Towards a Balance Sheet of Puerto Rican Migration", p. 716.

⁴²*Milwaukee Journal*, April 6, 1958.

terms of population, the city grew rapidly and its ethnic diversity was delineated as early as 1908 when the Gary Land Company, created to lay out the town, listed twenty-six nationality groups in a census taken that year. Blacks migrating from the south continually augmented Gary's population and Mexicans were already present by the 1920s. To this ethnically and racially heterogeneous population were added the Puerto Ricans in 1948.⁴³

The impetus for the Puerto Rican migration to Gary was the acute labor shortage suffered by U.S. Steel's Gary Works after World War II. Unable to recruit enough labor, as well as having a high turnover rate, the giant steel conglomerate began working with the Samuel J. Friedman Farm Labor Agency of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This agency had been recruiting agricultural workers in Puerto Rico for work in the states. The firm had also brought over several hundred Puerto Ricans to Lorain, Ohio for the National Tube Company, a subsidiary of United States Steel, in 1947 thereby helping to create a Puerto Rican community in Lorain. National Tube was also having problems meeting its labor demands and, because of the success of its experiment in Lorain, U.S. Steel decided to bring Puerto Ricans to Gary.⁴⁴

The Friedman Agency had its headquarters in San Juan and several of its employees worked in other areas of the Island. They advertised for laborers in newspapers and over the radio. The screening process was, according to Friedman, very rigid and one of the requirements was that the recruits have no major police record. The agency was paid by U.S. Steel for each recruit and the company also paid for a medical exam in Puerto Rico.⁴⁵

After World War II, Gary suffered an acute housing shortage. The workers who came were therefore housed in "Pullman City", a string of

⁴³Studies on Gary include Issac James Quillen, "Industrial City: A History of Gary, Indiana to 1929". Unpublished Ph. D. Dissertation, Yale University, 1942. and Richard J. Meister, "A History of Gary, Indiana: 1930-1940". Unpublished Ph. D. Dissertation, Notre Dame University, 1966. Also see Raymond A. Mohl and Neil Betten, "Ethnic Adjustment in the Industrial City: The International Institute of Gary, 1919-1940", *The International Migration Review*, 6:361-376. Winter, 1970; and their "The Failure of Industrial City Planning: Gary, Indiana, 1906-1910," *Journal of the Institute of Planners*, 38:203-215. July, 1972.

⁴⁴See the series of articles in the *Gary Post Tribune* dealing primarily with the contract laborers in Lorain, Ohio but also regarding the labor shortage in Gary and the need to import Puerto Ricans. *Gary Post Tribune*, June 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 1948. The acute labor shortage was particularly damaging to the steel industry because production was not keeping up with demand and there was talk of allocation to domestic markets. *Gary Post Tribune*, June 14, 1948.

⁴⁵For newspaper advertisements, see *El Mundo* (San Juan), June 17, 1948. One recruit told me he heard of the contracting of workers for Gary over the radio. Interview: Juan C., January 24, 1976. Also written correspondence with the former Superintendent of Industrial Relations at Gary Works from November 1948 to 1968, March 17, 1976.

Pullman sleeper cars sitting on tracks on company property. The recruits slept in upper and lower berths. There were toilet facilities at the end of the cars, bedding was provided and linen was changed by maids. Bathing facilities were non-existent, but workers could bathe in each of the departments where they worked. Later, a washhouse was provided in the area of Pullman City.⁴⁶

Several contract laborers had different assessments of Pullman City. They ranged from comfortable and clean to suffocating due to the heat in August. One Puerto Rican made the observation that the cars were not a very comfortable place to come to sleep after working eight hours in the mill. Some recruits began to cook in their "homes", although it was prohibited. For people used to certain foods for over twenty years of their life, it was hard to adjust to American cuisine. Company officials would take away cooking utensils and, at times, even the food.⁴⁷

Most of the recruits stayed in Pullman City only a few months, beginning to move into the city or to the Virginia Street apartments constructed by the company. These apartments were built across from the employment office in 1948 and 1949. There were several two-story buildings with a number of rooms in each apartment. The rooms were equipped with beds, bedding, dressers, lamps and other furnishings. There were adequate toilet and shower facilities in each building. The apartments were operated by a contractor who maintained them. Occupancy gradually diminished and the apartments were closed in the mid-1950s.⁴⁸

To many Puerto Ricans, Gary did not provide a conducive environment for living. For those who returned the reasons were several. Some left when the first snow fell. Others left because they did not like night work which was part of working in a steel company.⁴⁹ Homesickness also provided a reason for returning. In fact, there was a rash of homesickness, but some of it was cured by informal leaves of absence and, later, vacations, which permitted recruits to go back for a visit. For the married Puerto Ricans, this homesickness was lessened somewhat when they began to bring their families over.⁵⁰

Despite its many abuses the contract labor system provided thousands

⁴⁶ Written correspondence with the former Superintendent of Industrial Relations at Gary Works, March 17, 1976.

⁴⁷ Interviews: Delfin R., February 16, 1976; Isidro F., January 18, 1976; Guillermo M., January 24, 1976; and Julio C., January 22, 1976.

⁴⁸ Interviews: Ramon C., March 3, 1976; Julio C., January 22, 1976; Delfin R., February 16, 1976; Guillermo M., January 24, 1976; Isidro F., January 18, 1976. Written correspondence with former Superintendent of Industrial Relations at Gary Works, March 17, 1976.

⁴⁹ Interview: Julio C., January 22, 1976.

⁵⁰ Written correspondence with former Superintendent of Industrial Relations at Gary Works, March 17, 1976.

of Puerto Ricans with the opportunity to migrate to the United States. Some chose to go back to the Island, but many stayed and helped create the Puerto Rican communities one sees today on the mainland. It is important to note that these communities were, in large measure responsible for a change in the socioeconomic characteristics of the migrants that began to leave the Island in the post World War II period. Later, migrants would have more of a rural background and, concomitantly, were more likely to have been agricultural workers in Puerto Rico prior to migration.

The *Puerto Rican Journey*, a study of two core areas of Puerto Rican settlement in New York done in 1947, establishes that Puerto Ricans were predominantly from the three large urban centers of San Juan, Mayaguez, and Ponce. These migrants were more likely than the Island population to have been engaged in semiskilled or skilled occupations just prior to their leaving Puerto Rico and to have been disproportionately represented in the manufacturing industries on the Island.⁵¹ A comparison of these results with statistics from other cities shows that later migrants were more rural, and occupationally mirrored the Island population in 1950. Among these individuals, farming was the major occupation given in both Lorain, Ohio and Philadelphia by respondents in surveys when asked their last job in Puerto Rico.⁵² Rather than being a random process, a major contributor to this change was the contract labor system.

Samuel Friedman, who recruited agricultural and industrial workers, noted that he looked for recruits in rural areas because they made better workers. The Puerto Rican government followed a policy of recruiting agricultural workers to do agricultural work in the states under the premise that these individuals could better adapt to farm conditions than could non-agricultural workers.⁵³ If it follows that the founders of urban communities set the character of ethnic enclaves, then migrants who enter

⁵¹C. Wright Mills, Clarence Senior and Rose Kohn Goldsen, *The Puerto Rican Journey: New York's Newest Migrants*. New York: Russell and Russell, 1967. Pp. 32-38, 183 which is a reprint of the 1950 study by Harper and Brothers.

⁵²See Figure II in O'Brien, *A Survey of Puerto Ricans in Lorain, Ohio*, p. 9. Using the 1940 Census of Population for place of birth one finds that 95% of all migrants to Lorain were born in towns of less than 25,000. Even after internal migration is accounted for 65% still lived in towns of 25,000 or less just prior to migration. See Tables II and III in O'Brien, *A Survey of Puerto Ricans in Lorain, Ohio*, pp. 8,9. In New York, 82% of the sample came from towns of 25,000 or more. See Mills et al, *The Puerto Rican Journey*, p. 183. For occupations see O'Brien, *A Survey of Puerto Ricans in Lorain, Ohio*, p. 11; Seigal et al, *Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia*, p. 35 (Reprint edition by Arno Press, 1975); *1950 Census of Population, Vol. II, Characteristics of the Population, Territories and Possessions, Part 53, Puerto Rico*, p. 53-38.

⁵³Gary Post *Tribune*, June 9, 1948 and *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Labor*, 1949-50, p. 50.

established communities would be of the same background as the founders. This would be in keeping with the theory of the family intelligence service in the form of a letter sent back home to relatives and friends. Since one's relatives and acquaintances would be from the same area in Puerto Rico, those who followed would be similar in socioeconomic characteristics to the contract workers.

In 1890, an American consul asking the causes of emigration from Naples, always received the answer, "My friend in America is doing well and he has sent for me".⁵⁴ If one adds relatives, these words could have been uttered by thousands of Puerto Ricans. The importance of contract workers to the growth of Puerto Rican communities in the United States as well as to the socioeconomic nature of migrants who would come after the war, was that they provided the impetus for the coming of other migrants to the mainland. For through their letters back to the Island others made the trip to urban centers outside New York.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Philip Taylor, *The Distant Magnet: European Emigration to the U.S.A.* New York: Harper and Row, 1971, p. 90.

⁵⁵ Mills et al, *The Puerto Rican Journey*, p. 54; O'Brien, *A Survey of Puerto Ricans in Lorain, Ohio*, p. 15; Siegal et al, *Puerto Ricans in Philadelphia*, p. 70.