



EL GRITO DE JAYUYA

The 1930's and 40's were a particularly turbulent period in Puerto Rican history, with assassinations and massacres by u.s. colonial authorities that took Puerto Rican lives throughout the island-nation, as well as arrests of Nationalists and others who advocated Puerto Rican independence. Also during this period u.s. authorities began conducting sterilization campaigns and birth control testing on Puerto Rican women and cancer/radiation experimentation on Puerto Rican men, women and children. The Nationalist Party, which advocated Puerto Rican independence, took the position that it must defend the Puerto Rican people from u.s. imperialism and ultimately rid Puerto Rico of colonialism by any means necessary.

In 1948, the colonial government imposed Ley 53 (Law 53), or the gag law as it was known, which made it illegal to advocate the overthrow of the u.s. government in Puerto Rico. In practice, such things as raising the Puerto Rican flag, making speeches about Puerto Rican independence or even poetry that discussed Puerto Rican liberation were now against the law. That same year, Puerto Rican Nationalists attempted to assassinate the Governor of Puerto Rico to bring attention to the oppressive colonial situation on the island.

By 1949, Puerto Rican Nationalists began preparations for an armed revolution to free Puerto Rico that was scheduled to begin by 1952, the date that the United States Congress was to approve the new "Free Associated State", a status designed to obscure the island-nation's true colonial reality. The Nationalists chose Jayuya as safe space and headquarters and weapons were gathered and stored at the home of Nationalist Party member Blanca Canales.

In April 1950, u.s. President Harry Truman ordered his agents to destroy the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party and the campaign that followed would foreshadow the COINTELPRO operations that would be conducted in the u.s. some twenty years later against black nationalists, american dissidents and, again, Puerto Rican independentistas. u.s. Secretary of War, Louis Johnson, went to Puerto Rico and met with u.s. military leaders

and Puerto Rican politician Luis Munoz Marin and demanded that Marin either break up the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party or kill their leader, Albizu Campos, or both.

On October 26, 1950, the president of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party, Pedro Albizu Campos received word that police waiting to arrest him surrounded his home in San Juan and that other Nationalists had already been arrested. The next day a Nationalist caravan was stopped by police and in the ensuing gun battle four Nationalists and two police were killed. Albizu Campos called on the people of Puerto Rico to take up arms.

On Oct 30, 1950, Blanca Canales led armed Nationalists into the town of Jayuya and attacked and seized the police station, cut telephone lines, burned down the post office and marched to the town square where they raised the outlawed Puerto Rican flag. Canales then gave a speech where she declared Puerto Rico a free republic.

The United States immediately declared martial law in Puerto Rico and sent National Guard troops to attack Jayuya. u.s. bomber planes and ground artillery were used to quell the revolt but news of this u.s. military action, just one-thousand miles from u.s. shores, was not allowed to spread outside of the confines of the island. However, on November 1st, 1950, two Puerto Rican Nationalists, Griselio Torresola and Oscar Collazo, attempted to assassinate U.S. President Truman in New York City to insure that the call for liberation that was begun in Jayuya would not continue to be isolated and obscured within the Puerto Rico alone. Torresola was killed during this action and Collazo was captured and sentenced to execution via electric chair on October of 1951, but due to global pressure his sentence was reduced and he was eventually released after serving 29 years in prison.

By November 2nd, 1950, Police in Puerto Rico began arresting all of the leadership within the nationalist party, charging them with violating the gag law (Ley 53). This law was further enforced to arrest and imprison anyone with independence sentiments and many people were rounded up in the streets simply based on suspicion that they might be independentistas. Also during this time Pedro Albizu Campos was systematically tortured while in prison by the same doctor who had conducted radiation experiments on Puerto Ricans in the 1930s.

On June 4, 1951, a referendum was approved that Nationalist called illegitimate. This u.s. sanctioned law granted Puerto Ricans the right to draft their own constitution. The constituent assembly began its delib-

erations in the following September and in March of 1952 the electorate approved the new constitution. The colonial Popular Democratic Party led by Governor Luis Munoz Marin rose to power in the new elections and on July 25, 1952 (the anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Puerto Rico) they and the u.s. proclaimed the so-called Estado Libre Asociado (ELA) or Commonwealth. The Nationalist party renounced this new arrangement as yet another imperialist farce.

The attainment of commonwealth or free associated state status did not halt the struggle for total independence and was instead dismissed by Nationalists as what it was, a means of further masking and cementing the colonial condition of Puerto Rico, and on March 1st, 1954, the Nationalist again took up arms against the u.s. Government itself. Nationalist member Lolita Lebron led three other Nationalists, Raphael Cancel Miranda, Andres Figueroa Cordero, and Irving Flores Rodriguez in an attack on the u.s. House of Representatives in Washington D.C., wounding five members of congress. As the nationalists fired at the ceiling and into the gallery, they unfurled the Puerto Rican flag and shouted que viva Puerto Rico libre! (long live free Puerto Rico!). The four Nationalists were captured and sentenced to death, but subsequently had their sentences commuted to 70 years each. In Lolita Lebrons purse was found a "suicide note" that condemned the u.s. government not only for holding her nation captive, but also for the "barbarous torture of our apostle of independence, Pedro Albizu Campos".

Pedro Albizu Campos was released from prison on November 15 1964, sick and dieing, and passed on just five months later, on April 21 1965. Lolita Lebron and her compañeros were pardoned by the u.s. government in 1979 and released after serving 25 years in prison, but their examples of sacrifice and heroism during the Grito de Jayuya revolution went on to inspire new freedom fighters seeking to liberate Puerto Rico from colonialism once and for all.

text by not4prophet
art by vagabond

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