Negotiating Cold War Paradise:
U.S. Tourism, Economic Planning,
and Cultural Modernity
in Twentieth-Century Puerto Rico

In May 1958, following his highly publicized, hostile confrontation with the crowds of Caracas, Venezuela, Vice President Richard Nixon beat a hasty retreat to more tranquil surroundings in sunny Puerto Rico. The night of his arrival he spent forty minutes wading through four blocks of historic Old San Juan amid throngs of people who cheered “Arriba Nixon!” Later that evening, in the candle lit dining room of the four-hundred-year-old governor’s mansion, La Fortaleza, Governor Luis Muñoz Marín hosted a state dinner. Declared Nixon: “I couldn’t think of a better place to be.” To which a buoyant Muñoz replied: “Mr. Vice-President, está en su casa” [you are in your home].1

Although set apart by his celebrity, Richard Nixon was only one of approximately 250,000 U.S. citizens who annually made the trek to welcoming Puerto Rico in the late 1950s.2 By the mid-1960s, following the Cuban Revolution, the number of annual visitors swelled to more than 500,000 making Puerto Rico the Caribbean’s most visited island. Some came on business, a few like Nixon arrived in an official capacity, but most came as tourists. They frolicked on beaches, lapped up luxury in high rise hotels, overindulged in rum, gambled away dollars to casinos, sought out prostitutes, took to fairways and greens, visited historic sites, and browsed through rows of shops and boutiques. While their pursuit of leisure may seem trivial compared to the serious affairs of state that preoccupied Nixon, tourism had become over the previous two decades a central component of U.S.-Puerto Rican relations, and an important dimension of international relations.

The postwar era witnessed an unprecedented boom in international tourism. Pushed along by the growth of the American middle class, liberalized employee vacation benefits, easily available credit, the advent of affordable air travel, and

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The postwar boom came about, what private and government economists, few historians have examined why the rede

barge in the global economy. By the early 1960s Americans alone spent $3 billion per year traveling overseas.1 Over the next three decades, increasing numbers of U.S. citizens, joined by travelers from other industrialized countries, traversed all corners of the earth. By the mid-1990s, the World Tourism Organization reported that international tourism generated as much as $3.4 trillion annually, vying with oil as the world’s largest industry.4

While mass tourism has generated considerable interest among anthropologists, economists, and sociologists, few historians have examined why the postwar boom came about, what private and government efforts contributed to it, how the Cold War influenced its development, and the ways in which travel redefined international economic and cultural interaction. An explanation of U.S. tourism in Puerto Rico provides a case study. In recent years some historians of U.S. foreign relations have used postmodern theory to examine how cultural constructions of class, race, gender, and national identity shape perceptions of overseas societies.6 Influenced by recent trends, this study uses

2. World Tourism Organization, Compendium of Tourism Statistics (Madrid, 1996). See also
3. The leading scholarly journal on tourism studies is The Annals of Tourism Research. A partial
list of important works includes John M. Bryden, Tourism and Development: A Case Study of the
Commonwealth Caribbean (Cambridge, England, 1973); Dennis Conway, Tourism and Caribbean Develop-
ment (Hanover, NH, 1980); E. DeKadt, ed., Tourism: Passport to Development (Oxford, 1979); David
Engerman, “Research Agenda for the History of Tourism: Towards an International Social
(London, 1987); Marie-Françoise Lanfant, John B. Allcock, and Edward M. Bruner, eds., Interna-
tional Tourism: Identity and Change (London, 1995); J. Lea, Tourism and Development in the Third World
(London, 1988); Donald E. Lundberg et al., Tourism Economics (New York, 1995); Dean MacCannell,
in Asia (Honolulu, 1990); Shirley B. Seward and Bernard K. Spinard, eds., Tourism in the Caribbean:
The Economic Impact (Ottawa, 1982); Gareth Shaw and Allan M. Williams, Critical Issues in Tourism:
A Geographical Perspective (Cambridge, MA, 1994); Valen L. Smith, Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology

Historical studies dealing with international tourism include Frank Costigliola, Awkward Dominion: American Political, Economic, and Cultural Relations with Europe, 1909–1939 (Ithaca, 1984);
Christopher Endy, “Travel and World Power: Americans in Europe, 1890–1917,” Diplomatic History 22 (Fall 1998): 65–94; Maxine Fieffet, Tourism in History: From Imperial Rome to the Present (New York,
1987); Paul Fussell, Abroad: British Literary Traveling between the Wars (New York, 1983); Harvey
Levenstein, Seductive Journey: American Tourists in France from Jefferson to the Jazz Age (Chicago, 1998);
Thomas G. Paterson, Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution
(New York, 1994), 51–77, 100, 146, 220; Louis A. Pérez, On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and
Culture (Chapel Hill, 1999), 163–218; Edward Said, Culture and Imperialism (New York, 1993), xxviii, 75, 99,
187, 199, 265; Rosalie Schwartz, Pleasure Island: Tourism and Temptation in Cuba (Lincoln, 1997); and

6. Examples of the new scholarship include David Campbell, Writing Security: United States
Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity (Minneapolis, 1992); Kristin Hoganson, Fighting for American
Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars (New
Haven, 1998); Michelle Mart, “Tough Guys and American Cold War Policy: Images of Israel,
narrative sources such as travel guides, magazine articles, and advertisements, along with artifacts of material culture such as hotels, urban landscape, and historic parks, to deconstruct the texts and physical symbols of tourism. It also relies on U.S. and Puerto Rican government and business archives to reconstruct and analyze the economics and politics of travel. Taken together, these approaches, postmodern and structural, illuminate tourism’s multidimensional impact.

Although many U.S. visitors undoubtedly traveled to Puerto Rico in single-minded pursuit of fun and relaxation, they unavoidably became participants in a Cold War cultural experience. Commonwealth Puerto Rico, the advertising read, was a postcolonial territory tutored in democratic capitalism by the United States and generously granted autonomy. It had forsworn the turbulence that swept much of the Third World, denounced Castroism, and pursued what social scientists and U.S. officials called “modernization,” a development strategy based on the transfer of North American capital, technology, and values. The image juxtaposed the island’s tropical allure and its material progress, its rural simplicity and its advanced consumer offerings, its yearning for change and its stability. In short, Puerto Rico shone as a Cold War paradise, an outpost for liberal capitalism in a world seemingly tempted by the promises of communism.

Modernization theorists and Western foreign aid agencies during the Cold War trumpeted tourism in Puerto Rico and elsewhere as a mechanism for economic and cultural transformation. In celebrating Puerto Rico’s advance, U.S. visitors applauded their own national identity and political and business leaders added another dimension to Cold War propaganda. By the 1960s, however, tourism critics, taking their cue from Latin American dependency

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theorists, argued that instead of promoting development, the industry made developing societies more than ever pawns of the global market place. According to this view, developing states traded their dependence on sugar and coffee for a new dependence on beach front hotels. Tourism not only bestowed economic subservience, it also compelled host countries to bury their dignity and commodify their cultural traditions for mass consumption by affluent foreigners.9

Interestingly, while they worked from opposite ideological bases, modernization and dependency theorists similarly viewed the impact of tourism on host societies as overwhelming. Modernization theory assumed that the industry facilitates a voluntary transfer of capital and culture to needy countries. For dependency theorists world capitalism presented few options, and the process was coercive. Both schools nonetheless downplayed the desire or ability of the less powerful to resist integration, manipulate the visitor-host arrangement, and preserve or manufacture an independent identity. Both drew a rigid dichotomy between modern and traditional societies and did not probe how those lines become blurred as culture is globalized. Each simplistically concluded that tourism was either an unmitigated benefit or an unadulterated evil.

This study departs from both the modernization and dependency paradigms by emphasizing that tourism can be either a force for social progress or exploitation, depending on how it is promoted and regulated. It builds upon a literature, particularly works by Richard F. Kuisel, Geir Lundestad, and Richard Pells on U.S.-European relations, that explores how overseas peoples have responded to and manipulated U.S. hegemony.10 The anthropologist Marie-Françoise Lanfant has observed that “the tourist system of action” is not a monolithic force. Its impact varies from society to society, and it engages a network of private and public agents. Local communities are not passive, and often seize upon tourism as a means of communication to display their existence and establish their power.11 In Puerto Rico’s case, commonwealth authorities possessed just enough autonomous decision-making space within the


11. Lanfant et al., International Tourism.
imperial relationship to regulate the trade, protect workers, and gain a share of the revenue. Their economic planning also ensured that tourism never constituted more than 5 to 10 percent of the island’s gross product and ranked as only one component of a multifaceted developmental strategy. And while the deluge of Yankee sun worshipers seemed to threaten established constructions of class, race, gender, and cultural identity, it also led government officials, intellectuals, and artists to debate and dialogue with advocates of statehood and independence; mine the island’s Spanish, African, and indigenous past; and articulate a sense of Puerto Rican identity through an array of historic and cultural programs designed for tourists and natives alike.12

This is not to deny American hegemony over Puerto Rico. U.S. domination was, and is, reflected in the island’s commonwealth status, a condition that falls far short of independence; its need for U.S. investment and trade; and the ongoing U.S. military presence. Still, as the scholar John Tomlinson has noted, the term “cultural imperialism” is commonly used but problematic to define. Given the complexities of each word taken separately, “culture” and “imperialism,” it makes more sense to speak of discourses of culture, imperialism, and power rather than to try to formulate a hard and fast theory. Travel narratives and popular discourses of tourism illuminate how governments, media, businesses, workers, and consumers ultimately facilitate the spread of “cultural modernity.”13 Modernity should not be confused with “modernization,” the term associated with Washington’s Cold War prescriptions for political and economic change. Rather, it connotes a consciousness that elevates mass culture, urbanism, rationality, science, and mastery over nature. To be modern, the theorist Marshall Berman has posited, is to find ourselves in an environment that promises economic and technological growth, yet at the same time to feel threatened by the loss of our most revered customs and life ways.14


Modernity is not simply imposed from the outside, but rather represents “the main cultural direction for global development.” It is an outgrowth of the world capitalist system and nineteenth-century imperialism, which allowed the industrialized West to accumulate and wield immense power, but by the mid-twentieth century it cut across boundaries of geography, nationality, class, race, and gender. Industrial and postindustrial societies, particularly powerful government and business interests, often take the lead in shaping global culture. Yet with the passage of decades, the process becomes increasingly dynamic, and weaker, colonial and postcolonial peoples—both elites and commoners—can also become transforming agents. The resulting changes can deplete a community’s cultural resources and at the same time spur efforts to manufacture an idealized sense of self. Modernity is transmitted through many channels: industrialization, trade, diplomacy, media, and the migration of people. Tourism became a principal battleground on which both Americans and Puerto Ricans contested and negotiated their modern identities.

Tourism has historically played an essential role in the United States’s invention of itself as a culture. In his pathbreaking book, Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century, John F. Sears has examined the roots of this process. Absent the rich material culture of cathedrals, landscaped gardens, and national monuments that excited tourist imaginations in Europe, American travel enthusiasts by the 1820s flocked to places of natural, scenic beauty such as the Hudson River valley, Niagara Falls, and New Hampshire’s White Mountains. Travel writers and artists transformed these landscapes into “sacred places” and helped define the United States as god’s chosen land. By the turn of the century, mass transportation and rising incomes contributed to the commercialization of the nation’s pilgrimage sites and ushered in a new era of tourism more in keeping with the modern values of material progress and mass consumption. American tourists still relished communing with nature but increasingly valued preserved natural landscapes that provided temporary refuge from their structured, industrial work regimens. At the same time, they sought out theme parks and museums, urban attractions, and the comforts of resort life to celebrate their new affluence and the arrival of modernity.

These tourism traditions accompanied American travelers south of the border at the turn of the twentieth century. Acquired and awarded colonial status following the U.S. victory over Spain in 1898, Puerto Rico ranked with Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica, and the Dominican Republic as a featured tropical attraction for an affluent and adventurous leisure class. In the days before mass

15. Tomlinson, Cultural Imperialism, 27
tourism, most who traveled to Puerto Rico went by steamship from New York, a four-day voyage by the 1920s that cost about $75. The early guidebooks, what the scholar Edward Said has termed a literature of exploration and discovery, highlighted Puerto Rico's natural beauty. The healing powers of Coamo Springs in the Central Cordillera; the rain forest and waterfalls at the foot of the lofty peak El Yunque; the wild begonias, orchids, and of course the palm-lined beaches made writers marvel. "Its unbroken mountainous character, makes any detailed description of its scenic beauties a waste of time; it could be little more than a series of exclamations of delight," wrote Harry Frank in 1920.17

Yet early travel writers also paid homage to the United States's civilizing and modernizing powers and speculated that the new colony would progress under Washington's guiding hand. Philip Marsden's Sailing South explained to readers that the United States had acquired Puerto Rico as an afterthought following the crusade to free Cuba, but had brought to it modern health care, highways, civil administration, and English-language education.18 The tourist trade, according to these modernization narratives, merely extended the rehabilitative value of association with the United States by promising an influx of capital, technology, and travel conveniences. By the early 1930s the beachfront capital city of San Juan boasted two foreign-owned tourist hotels, a handful of restaurants, and several nightclubs and casinos where travelers could unwind and relieve themselves of a few dollars. The tourist, John Jennings thus noted in Our American Tropics, "takes nothing out of the country except a few souvenirs for which he pays extremely well, to say the least, and a coat of tan." He is "the modern goose that lays the golden egg and as such he should be treated with respect."19

Meanwhile, colonialism and tourism were fast making the island a meeting ground for distinctive cultures. A few American visitors during these years developed an appreciation for Puerto Rico. In addition to its natural beauty, the island featured three bustling urban centers, San Juan, Mayagüez, and Ponce, and maintained a relatively extensive system of roads, bridges, and ports.20 Most travel narratives, however, advanced a derogatory set of perceptions that did not bode well for intercultural understanding or mutual identity formation. Guidebooks of the period disparaged the island's widespread poverty, illiteracy, and health problems, and depicted a helpless, dependent people, a foreign "other," who lived outside the boundaries of the civilized world. U.S. travel writers, reflecting the mores of the Jim Crow era, typically portrayed

18. Phillip S. Marsden, Sailing South (Boston, 1921), 123–212.
20. A sympathetic portrait of Puerto Rico can be found in Marion Blythe, An American Bride in Porto Rico (New York, 1911).
Puerto Ricans as a “mongrel race,” among whom the Iberian tradition of mañana obstructed U.S. plans for reform and progress.21

During the formative years, U.S. tourism in Puerto Rico in fact took on the exploitative characteristics ascribed to the travel industry by dependency theorists. Imposed on the island by outsiders and reliant on foreign capital for hotels and infrastructure, it was a colonial enterprise, pure and simple. The 1930s witnessed the first coordinated effort by U.S. officials to package Puerto Rico for mass tourism. The U.S.-appointed governor, Blanton Winship, viewed the industry as an avenue to recovery from the decade’s devastating depression and as the centerpiece for U.S.-led economic development. Using Florida and Bermuda as models, he launched a road beautification program and expanded and improved accommodations and other facilities. He also established the island’s first Tourism Bureau and opened a branch office in New York that worked to bring conferences and conventions to San Juan.22

Winship grasped the centrality of image, advertising, and cultural symbols. He hired a U.S. public relations firm to increase press coverage of the island and churn out travel guides highlighting Puerto Rico’s climate, beaches, golf courses, and deep sea fishing. The effort portrayed Puerto Rico in condescending terms: a poverty stricken land whose simple people awaited the opportunity to serve their northern benefactors. It particularly accented popular constructions of gender, with posters featuring attractive female models in swimsuits posed on San Juan’s beaches: “beautiful señoritas at the Canto de Piedras,” one caption read. Another promotional featured “beautiful girls from Aguadilla, at Columbus Park,” Christopher Columbus’s landing place in Puerto Rico. Numerous scholars have analyzed the gendering of colonial dependencies.23 Colonial tourism literature commonly depicted Puerto Rico as a generous hostess, accepting of male domination and eager to pamper her paying guests.


Representations of Puerto Rico also highlighted a colonial oasis on the cusp of modernity: an exotic, frontier destination, awaiting settlement and civilization, and yet a safe, familiar part of an expanding American empire. Thus, tourists could relish the sense of masculine adventure and reconnect with U.S. pioneer myths by being abroad in a Spanish speaking culture, while enjoying the convenience of a North American road system and the ease of conducting business with U.S. currency in English. It was a land “Spanish in tradition and feeling,” Merle Colby wrote in *Puerto Rico: A Profile*, yet “North American in purpose and destiny.”

Governor Winship’s campaign failed to take hold, in part because of the Depression-plagued 1930s economy and the war that followed, but even more because of the rising nationalism that shaped Puerto Rican politics during the decade. The nationalist movement was primarily associated with the name Pedro Albizu Campos, a graduate of Harvard Law School, a former U.S. Army officer, and leader of the Nationalist party. In the harsh Depression atmosphere, compounded by punishing hurricanes in 1928 and 1932, Albizu’s denunciation of U.S. colonial rule and call to arms found a receptive audience. At the same

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time, the “1930s generation” of Puerto Rican intellectuals, led by the renowned Antonio S. Pedreira, decried the forced instruction of English in public schools, celebrated the Spanish language and “hispanidad” culture, and denounced Anglo-Saxon society as ruthlessly materialistic and acquisitive.  Although the independentistas remained a minority, with Albizu and most of his key followers imprisoned by the end of the 1930s, their views and those of the cultural nationalists set the stage for Puerto Rico’s quest for a new political status and reborn cultural identity.

In this context, Puerto Rico first experienced the innovative leadership of Luis Muñoz Marín. The son of Luis Muñoz Rivera, Puerto Rico’s resident commissioner in Washington and an advocate of autonomy rather than independence, the younger Muñoz had been educated in the United States, studied law at Georgetown University, and pursued a literary career as a poet before returning to his homeland. After a stint as an independentista, Muñoz’s pragmatism and Puerto Rico’s dependence on the colonial metropole for investment dollars and markets led him to champion commonwealth status, an ill-defined middle ground between independence and colonialism. As a leader of the Liberal party in the Puerto Rican Senate he cleverly denounced the domination of the island’s economy by U.S. sugar companies without denouncing capitalism itself. He nonetheless signaled an intention to revamp the economy and endorsed the Chardón Plan, named for its author, the Puerto Rican agronomist Carlos Chardón, that called for land reform and rapid industrialization.

Winship’s tourism activities, particularly his effort to impose a fun-loving, resort-centered identity on the island, won the wrath of both independence and commonwealth advocates. Puerto Rican commentators chafed at Winship’s portrayal of the island’s inhabitants as humble servants and denounced the travel business as the latest harbinger of dependence. In the columns of La Democracia, a Liberal party organ, the journalist and Muñoz confidante Ruby Black ridiculed the tourism campaign and compared the governor to Sinclair Lewis’s fictitious “Babbitt,” a man absorbed by “fishing, golf, and tourism,” too deficient in intellect and energy to attend to the island’s substantive needs. “Hunger, rum, death, blood,” she wrote, “Babbitt the tourist, has us imprisoned with chains of trout, with walls of golf balls.”

Luis Muñoz Marín, who later oversaw Puerto Rico’s postwar tourism planning, joined the critics. In 1938 he organized the Popular Democratic party (Partido Populare Democratica, or PPD), which melded his moderate commonwealth cause with a populist economic program. The PPD adopted the straw-hatted jíbaro, or peasant farmer, as its symbol, an icon of Puerto Rico’s

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fast-fading, rural culture. Its leftist slogan of “Pan, Tierra, y Libertad” promised land redistribution and the creation of new, job-producing, state-owned industries. Thus, he assembled a powerful coalition of hacendados (local land owners), landless peasants, unemployed workers, and the middle class. An immensely talented politician, Muñoz recognized in anti-tourism an issue that could carry dividends at the ballot box. In the 1940 legislative elections, he echoed others in denouncing Winship’s tourism initiatives as an attempt to gloss over the island’s social and economic malaise and demonized the governor’s unpopular salt tax, which financed tourism promotion. When charges of casino corruption arose, Muñoz even demanded that San Juan’s slot machines be tossed into the sea.

The PPD’s smashing victory at the polls in 1940 set the stage for Muñoz’s domination of Puerto Rican politics for nearly three decades and afforded an opportunity to develop a locally planned and regulated tourist industry. Pre-requisite to the effort was a redefinition of Puerto Rico’s political status. After becoming the island’s first elected governor in 1948, Muñoz negotiated with Washington the passage of Public Law 600, which conferred on Puerto Rico limited self-government under federal jurisdiction. Washington kept control over the island’s judiciary and military, but San Juan gained the power to tax, regulate, and subsidize Puerto Rico’s economy. Puerto Ricans maintained U.S. citizenship (first granted by the Jones Act of 1917), although they did not receive the right to vote in federal U.S. elections. The legislation won popular approval on the island in a 1951 plebiscite that offered a choice only between commonwealth or colonial status, much to the dismay of both statehood and independence advocates.

As Muñoz reshaped the island’s political identity, he also refined his economic agenda. Again, he sought greater self-reliance for the island without severing close ties to the United States. With his American-educated economic adviser, Teodoro Moscoso, Muñoz established Puerto Rico’s Economic Planning Board, or “Fomento.” The two abandoned their initial preference for state-owned enterprises, shared by the wartime governor, New Dealer Rexford Tugwell, and used their newly acquired taxing authority to offer exemptions to both Puerto Rican and U.S. investors willing to undertake new ventures. The goal was to use Keynesian methods to transform Puerto Rico from a sugar producing, colonial entity to a technologically innovative and job-producing industrial workshop. Ever mindful of his popular political base, Muñoz’s modernist vision included public-private collaboration and state subsidies for
key industries. To provide for the poor, commonwealth status assured access to federal welfare programs and emigration rights to the United States. The development strategy became known as “Operation Bootstrap.”

The Muñoz administration also vigorously suppressed the independentista movement by prosecuting activists under the island’s sweeping ley de la mordaza, “the law of the muzzle.” The loosely worded law made it a crime to attempt, through violent or other means, to overthrow the island’s government. Recently released documents show that the Commonwealth government had an ally of sorts in the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which kept files on thousands of Puerto Rican independence activists during the period, interestingly including Governor Muñoz because of his erroneously suspected ties to Communist movements during the 1930s. Frustrated Puerto Rican nationalists turned to violence, including the assassination in 1950 of San Juan’s mayor, the attempted assassination the same year of President Harry Truman in Washington, and a shooting spree on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives in 1954. Co-opted and repressed, the independentista movement diminished in strength. The Independence party (Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño, or PIP) ranked as the second largest vote getter in the 1952 elections, but by 1960 ran a distant third, garnering fewer than twenty-five thousand votes. In a second plebiscite on political status in 1967, the independence option won less than 1 percent of the vote, compared to 60.5 percent for commonwealth and 38.9 percent for statehood.

Once Muñoz fully assumed power, he delegated to Fomento’s Teodoro Moscoso the task of restructuring the tourist industry. The initial effort would not be left solely to private enterprise and foreign investors, but instead would draw on government subsidies. In contrast to the colonial authority’s earlier efforts to make tourism the island’s economic mainstay, Fomento’s planners envisioned the industry as only a small part of a planned, capitalist economy, topping off at 5 to 10 percent of Puerto Rico’s gross product. That figure contrasted with other vacation retreats in the Atlantic-Caribbean area, such as the Bahamas and the U.S. Virgin Islands, which relied on travel for up to 80 percent of their national incomes. Manufacturing, especially textiles, cement, chemicals, and pharmaceuticals, constituted the core of Operation Bootstrap.

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Fomento officials readily acknowledged that tourism mandated reliance on foreign consumers, but they sought to attract a select group of well-heeled visitors, targeting upper and upper-middle class vacationers from the eastern United States. Schooled in the English language and North American culture, and typically holders of American university degrees, Puerto Rican elites such as Muñoz and Moscoso knew how to package their homeland to live up to the vacation fantasies of U.S. consumers. They also possessed wide-ranging government, business, and media contacts. Government reports speculated in 1949 that a modest, public investment of $1.7 million annually for office staff, advertising, and industry subsidies would generate roughly $15,600,000 in dollar revenue, create four thousand new jobs, and bankroll a host of new development projects.36 Equally important, Moscoso stressed how many of the island’s foreign investors first discovered Puerto Rico as vacationers. “Scratch a tourist,” he was fond of saying, “and you’ll find an investor underneath.”37

The effort first required a tourism infrastructure, especially the updating of the island’s transportation network. Although cruise ships continued to ply the waters between Florida and San Juan, and made a comeback in the 1970s and 1980s with the popularization of cruise vacations, it was the availability of affordable and efficient air travel that made modern, mass tourism possible during the 1950s and 1960s. Pan American Airlines, which flew its first flight to Puerto Rico in the 1920s, inaugurated daily nonstop flights between New York and San Juan in 1946. Three years later, anticipating future demand, construction commenced on San Juan’s $15 million Isla Verde airport, a facility capable of handling more than five hundred flights per day.38

A transportation breakthrough came in 1951 when Fomento received authorization from the U.S. Bureau of Civil Aviation to allow Eastern Airlines to land in San Juan, thus breaking PanAm’s monopoly, allowing the government to play one corporation against another, and spurring lower airfares. By 1952 the Puerto Rican Tourist Bureau advertised six to eight hour flights from New York for $128 roundtrip; and ten hour flights from Chicago for $275.39 By 1958 the fare from New York had fallen to $90, “a total of 3200 miles at a cost of 2.8c per mile versus 2.9c per mile for an average Manhattan subway ride.”40 Daily jet service,

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36. For projections on expenditures and income see Summary of 1949–1950 Budget, Office of Tourism, Oficina del Gobernador, box 207.
commencing in late 1959, further reduced travel time from New York to three and one-half hours.\textsuperscript{41}

Another turning point came in 1949 when Moscoso hired J. Stanton Robbins, an American who had worked on the reconstruction of Virginia’s Colonial Williamsburg, to head Fomento’s Tourism Bureau.\textsuperscript{42} Soon, the bureau was publishing \textit{Qué Pasa in Puerto Rico}, a glossy magazine, still in print today, that featured photographs and articles on leading attractions and listed the island’s hotels, inns, and restaurants.\textsuperscript{43} That initiative was followed by the monthly “Puerto Rico Travel Newsletter,” a trade publication distributed to overseas, mainly U.S.-based, travel agents to update them on travel arrangements, accommodations, and package deals.\textsuperscript{44} In mid-1950 the Puerto Rican government opened a Tourist Bureau office at Rockefeller Plaza in New York. Fomento then established schools for hotel and restaurant employees and created a system for responding to letters of complaint from demanding North American visitors. Methods were also developed for surveying departing tourists to help the government refine its tourism strategy.\textsuperscript{45} Fomento even set up training courses for taxi cab drivers that taught traffic laws, “accident prevention,” the basics of the English language, and tidbits of San Juan’s history.

The Tourist Bureau also prepared the island for the legalization of gambling, a draw for U.S. citizens at a time when legal gambling was a rarity. The government cited the nineteen-year-old Nevada experiment to show how regulation could counter undesirable side effects, especially infiltration by organized crime.\textsuperscript{46} Puerto Rico legalized casino gambling in late 1948, created a gambling division within the Tourist Bureau, and hired a corps of inspectors. Despite protests from smaller hotels and inns, the government licensed only establishments larger than two hundred rooms. In fact, only two such hotels existed in San Juan in 1948, and many of the mega-hotels that arose in the following decade were government owned. The legislation also required casinos to implement dress codes and prohibit alcoholic beverages on premises. Finally, consistent with Muñoz’s anti-gambling posture in the 1940 elections, the government refused to sanction slot machines. For the most part, the strategy worked. Travel magazines praised Puerto Rico’s casinos for their scrupulous management, and a 1969 government study cited several cases of

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{New York Times}, 6 December 1959.
\textsuperscript{42} J. Stanton Robbins to Tourist Advisory Board, 16 September 1949, Oficina del Gobernador, box 2017.
\textsuperscript{44} “Puerto Rican Travel Newsletter” (San Juan: Department of Tourism, December 1946), Oficina del Gobernador, box 2017.
\textsuperscript{45} “Puerto Rican Travel Newsletter” (San Juan: September 1946), Oficina del Gobernador, box 2017; “Puerto Rican Travel Newsletter” (San Juan, December 1946), Oficina del Gobernador, box 2017; Tourist Information from a Postcard Survey of Hotel Guests (San Juan, 1962); Development of Tourism in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.
mob infiltration at gambling establishments that had been uncovered and corrected by commonwealth officials.47

Infrastructure alone could not spark mass tourism. Critical to the undertaking, and a pivotal component of cultural modernity, was the refashioning of Puerto Rico’s overseas image. For more than a half century the island’s people had been portrayed in narratives, including Blanton Winship’s tourism ads, as dependent and subservient “others.” Stereotypes had been reinforced by the migration of roughly fifty thousand Puerto Ricans annually, mainly to New York and the urban northeast, during the late 1940s and 1950s. A 1947 pictorial essay in Life magazine described the migration as the first airborne diaspora in history and dramatized the health, housing, and employment problems. Academic sociologists who studied New York’s Puerto Ricans rushed to conclude that the immigrants lacked community structures, voluntary organizations, and other coping systems. For this reason Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan placed the United States’s latest newcomers “beyond the melting pot.”48

In popular culture, the 1958 Broadway musical West Side Story—although sympathetic to the immigrant’s plight—reinforced these images by choreographing its characters as hot-tempered, knife-wielding juvenile delinquents. The popular musical drew an even less flattering image of Puerto Rico itself, a place, according to song, devoid of modern symbols such as washing machines, highways, and Buicks.

In 1948 the commonwealth government contracted the New York public relations firm Hamilton Wright to engineer a media blitz. A veritable army of U.S. journalists descended upon Puerto Rico where they were chauffeured about, given access to Governor Muñoz, and fed a steady diet of government press releases. Publications such as Travel, Saturday Review, and the travel page of the New York Times soon filled with articles, advertisements, and photos that accentcd the island’s climate, its historic architecture, and its natural beauty. These tropical images had been central to earlier advertising. In the commonwealth era, however, Puerto Rican officials also conveyed an image of a proud, self-confident island embracing economic and cultural modernity.49 An array of publications told the story of “Operation Bootstrap,” the name itself a powerful metaphor in Yankee culture for hard work and self-reliance. Under Muñoz’s leadership, the headlines proclaimed, annual earnings had risen from $125 per capita in 1940 to $114 by 1960, a total second only to Venezuela in Latin America. In the years 1958–59 alone 237 firms had signed contracts with Fomento, 100 of which were local firms whose control lay in Puerto Rican hands. Once a

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49. Hamilton Wright to Governor Piñero, 7 May 1948, Oficina del Gobernador, box 1416; Hamilton Wright to Governor Piñero, 17 May 1948, Oficina del Gobernador, box 1436.
producer of mainly sugar and rum, Puerto Rico now had over 600 factories churning out manufactured goods and generating thousands of jobs.\textsuperscript{50}

The reinvention of Puerto Rico required above all the construction and advertisement of a glamorous and modern tourist zone. As late as 1940 San Juan’s skyline included only one true skyscraper, the ten-story art-deco style Banco Popular. But immediately following the end of the war, Moscoso and Fomento surveyed the city for suitable hotel sites, calculating the square footage required, investment costs, and profits and jobs generated.\textsuperscript{51} They targeted the Condado area along the city’s northern beach-lined coast as the island’s primary tourist zone, and plans went into motion to have available two thousand first class hotel rooms for 1952.\textsuperscript{52} Glitzy, high-rise hotels not only served the tourist’s desire for comfortable, convenient housing, entertainment, and restaurants, but also conveyed the message that Puerto Rico was fast progressing into the second half of the twentieth century.

Local government, rather than foreign-based conglomerates, laid the cornerstone for the new cityscape. Puerto Rico’s first large hotel venture, the stunning \$7.2 million Caribe Hilton, was entirely government financed, built, and owned. Its planning nonetheless demonstrates the multiplicity of agents in tourism promotion. First, the commonwealth needed to persuade the U.S. Navy to give up a spectacular, wind-swept strip of peninsula, strategically located between historic Old San Juan and the emerging Condado district, where the proposed hotel would be built. It had been a federal reserve since the 1899 Treaty of Paris, and in recent times leased to a retired naval officer who owned a home there. The Puerto Rican government rallied allies in the Interior Department, which oversaw territorial affairs, to negotiate the transfer.\textsuperscript{53} Then Moscoso sent out letters to seven U.S. hotel companies that proposed a joint venture with the Puerto Rican government that placed management in company hands, reserved ownership for the government, and arranged a sharing of profits — with the majority percentage reserved for the commonwealth. Only the Hilton Corporation, eager to enter the international hotel business, agreed to the public-private partnership. Conrad Hilton, the company’s founder, thoughtfully responded with a letter in Spanish, and after several visits to Puerto Rico, secured the contract.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{50} Hamilton Wright to Arthur Hays Sulzburger, 30 November 1946, Oficina del Gobernador, box 1437; Hamilton Wright to Teodoro Moscoso, 6 December 1948, Oficina del Gobernador, box 1416.


\textsuperscript{54} Teodoro Moscoso to Junta de Directores, Compañía de Fomento Industrial de Puerto Rico, 16 October 1946, Oficina de Gobernador, box 2003; \textit{Caribe News}, 9 December, 1949, Hilton
When construction was completed in late 1949, the ten-story, three hundred room, honeycombed Caribe Hilton stood out boldly on Old San Juan peninsula. Its dazzling white facade contrasted sharply with the sparkling blue sea, and its modernity juxtaposed the centuries’ old San Gerónimo Fort nearby. A testimony to advanced technology, it had a swimming pool carved out of blue coral stone that held salt water replaced by attendants every four hours. The beachfront was also a product of engineering know-how, human-made of powdery, coral sand so as not to stick uncomfortably to sunbathers. The hotel’s open-air entrance took visitors through a manicured garden, signifying the taming of the tropics, and led to the front desk. The interior’s controlled environment, air-conditioned throughout, consisted of a tasteful collage of stone, glass, and stainless steel.55

The grand opening of the Caribe Hilton constituted nothing less than an extravaganza. Governor Muñoz sent personal invitations to hundreds of prominent Americans, including members of Congress, Vice President Alben

Hotel Corporation Collection (HCC), box 17, Conrad N. Hilton Archives, University of Houston, Houston, Texas. Also see Maldonado, Muccka, 121–22.

Barkely, Eleanor Roosevelt, and publisher Henry Luce. Life magazine ran a three-page spread with enlarged photos, and Time described the arrival of planeloads of guests, including actresses Alexis Smith and Gloria Swanson, Eastern Airlines president Eddie Rickenbacker, and David Rockefeller. The wealthy throng enjoyed a round of banquets, swimming parties, and tennis. On opening night, the casino racked up a $1,000 net loss for management. “Boy, we gave them a complete party,” exclaimed Conrad Hilton.

The Caribe Hilton served as the inaugural project of the island’s blossoming tourism industry. Following its opening, the reconstruction of San Juan accelerated. The World War I era Condado Beach hotel, only a few blocks from the Caribe, received a government-assisted $1.3 million facelift. Soon the landscape of Ashford Avenue, the Condado’s main thoroughfare – once no more than a narrow strip of beach road between the open Atlantic and Condado’s lagoon – filled with restaurants, shops, and hotels. For the Commonwealth government, the Condado represented a promising source of public revenue and a stimulus for private enterprise, as well as an important symbol of Puerto Rican modernity. For affluent Americans, steeped in Cold War rhetoric, such tourist districts provided material evidence that the United States represented the world’s most potent force for material progress. Testimony to technology and a symbol of abundance, the Caribe and other high-rises seemed to demonstrate that the American Dream had universal application. “San Juan is a new Miami with a Spanish accent,” gloated the Saturday Review in 1952.

Conrad Hilton, part self-promoter and part tourism ideologue, often sermonized that trade, travel, and hotels brought together the peoples of many lands in a mutually beneficial exchange. Downplaying the centrality of corporate earnings, he explained in one speech: “Rather than assume the role of invaders intent upon siphoning back all profits to the United States, we have joined in a business fellowship with foreign entrepreneurs.” “Each of our hotels,” he declared on another occasion, “is a ‘little America,’ not as a symbol of bristling power, but as a friendly center where men of many nations and of good will may speak the language of peace.” Hilton also conferred upon his overseas ventures a ceremonial Cold War mission: “Our Hilton house flag is one small flag of freedom which is being waved defiantly against Communism exactly as Lenin predicted. With humility we submit this international effort of ours as a contribution to world peace.”

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56. Luis Muñoz Marín to Vice President Alben Barkely, 28 October 1949, Oficina del Gobernador, box 1239.
57. Life, 26 December 1949, 72–74.
58. Fiftieth Annual Report of the Governor of Puerto Rico, 90; on the Condado Beach Hotel see National Geographic, April 1951, 423.
Puerto Rico’s lunge toward modernity did not go uncontested and many islanders questioned the transferability of America’s Cold War consumer culture. The editors of the influential Spanish-language daily *El Mundo* decried the Caribe Hilton as a sellout to foreigners and predicted that the initiative would surely fail. 61 Even some members of Muñoz’s PPD denounced casino gambling, challenged the wisdom of the $7 million Caribe investment, and questioned the allocation of public funds to the leisure industry. Rafael Picó, a planning official, argued that the commonwealth would be better served by public investments in education and social welfare and pleaded with Muñoz to reverse course. 62

As the island braced for its first large wave of foreign tourists, critics also emphasized the harm posed to Puerto Rican culture. Raúl Gándara, San Juan’s fire chief and a strong Muñoz backer, ridiculed the government’s willingness to “degrade itself by buying tourists.” 63 And in a series of articles published in 1952, *El Mundo* warned that Puerto Rico would be inundated by an army of “suntarios,” rich tourists who cared little about the island and sought only to indulge their love of luxury, sun, and casinos. In search of souvenirs and kitsch, they threatened to degrade Puerto Rico’s artistic traditions. In pursuit of illicit sex and drugs, they threatened society’s moral well-being. In time, the newspaper predicted, city planners, police, and educators would join artists and prostitutes, minimize their responsibilities toward their native communities, and dutifully serve the tourists. 64

Muñoz and Moscoso staunchly defended both the Hilton deal and tourism as a whole. “How do you expect to pay for public education and social welfare,” Moscoso chided his critics, “if the commonwealth is barred from earning revenue.” 65 At the same time the administration predicted that the Caribe Hilton would become a point of pride, a mark of architectural distinction and symbol of modern Puerto Rico. The journal *Architectural Forum* emphasized the role of New York consultants Warner Leeds and Associates in overseeing the project, commenting that the hotel had “the color, texture, and finish demanded by Americans off to the semi-tropics.” 66 But Moscoso and others at Fomento emphasized that the Caribe had been designed by a local San Juan firm, headed by architects Osvaldo Toto and Miguel Ferrer, and reflected a unique Puerto Rican style – functional, clean, and modern. In the weeks leading up to the

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grand opening. Fomento ran ads in local newspapers congratulating the native contractors who had participated in the project.\footnote{Maldonado, \textit{Moscoso}, 124. To identify the local contractors on the Caribe Hilton examine the daily \textit{El Mundo}, especially for the week of 20 December 1949.}

Anti-tourism sentiment would intensify as the industry grew, but during the early 1950s it remained only an undercurrent in Puerto Rican cultural discourse. After all, the PPD easily captured majorities in the island’s first several elections, and its main competitor, the Republican Statehood party (PER), strongly favored close ties to the United States and applauded tourism. Most important, the number of vacationers coming to the island remained relatively small and manageable, in the tens of thousands annually rather than the hundreds of thousands that arrived later in the decade.

The commonwealth government, moreover, accompanied its embrace of modernity with a reverence for the rustic, recognizing that Puerto Ricans and North Americans alike regretted the passing of established life ways. During the 1950s numerous U.S. social critics decried the impersonal and anti-individualistic nature of contemporary, mass society, lamented the shallowness of suburban life, and pondered America’s loss of purpose and national identity. David Riesman critiqued the “other directed personality” who excelled in the business world but lacked self-awareness, and William Allen Whyte urged “organization men” to rebel against bureaucratic conformity.\footnote{On “authenticity” see MacCannell, \textit{The Tourist}, 156.} Hungry for authenticity, or at least what tourism scholars have termed “staged authenticity,” a certain breed of anti-tourism tourists could escape San Juan’s “air conditioned ghettos” and reconnect with the United States’s frontier past by exploring the island’s rural byways.\footnote{For an excellent discussion of 1950s social criticism and its intersection with U.S. foreign relations see Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman, \textit{All You Need Is Love: The Peace Corps and the Spirit of the 1960s} (Cambridge, MA, 1998), 16–22.}

Stung by domestic discontent and concerned about the overbuilding of the capital city, the commonwealth government eagerly accommodated. In the mid-1950s, following a government study of Western Europe’s popular bed and breakfast industry, Fomento began extending subsidies and tax breaks to smaller, more affordable inns.\footnote{Frank T. Martocci to Carlos M. Passalacqua (president, Puerto Rico Industrial Development Company), 22 July 1954, Oficina del Gobernador, box 2098; H.C. Barton to Teodoro Moscoso and attached report, 15 February 1955, Oficina del Gobernador, box 2016.} At the same time, popular travel writing emphasized that three thousand miles of road allowed travelers to avoid the familiar “tourist traps” and discover the “outer island.”\footnote{\textit{Travel}, November 1967, 52–57; \textit{Saturday Review}, 12 May 1962, 52.} The travel section of the \textit{Saturday Review} informed would-be pioneers that despite “its discovery, there are endless rural byways in Puerto Rico where few tourists have yet trod.” Taking the northern shoreline route, one encountered a “displaced coastal
Africa,” a dirt pathway lined with palm trees, dotted with thatched huts, and inhabited by black Puerto Ricans descended from runaway slaves. To tap the tourist’s thirst for authenticity, the government also initiated the restoration of Old San Juan, the city’s historic district, which consisted of eight blocks of Spanish colonial offices, residences, churches, and fortresses. In the spring of 1949, Tourist Bureau Director Stanton Robbins invited a group of former colleagues from Colonial Williamsburg, led by Kenneth Chorley, to San Juan to advise the project. The Rockefeller Foundation had established during the late 1920s and 1930s at the former Virginia capital a cultural display that idealized the U.S. past, exalted the nation’s future, and promised sizable commercial dividends. Robbins explained the endeavor in Old San Juan to Governor Muñoz: “We are working on various plans to keep the essential character and maintain the area in full usefulness and have it contribute to our tourist development.”

In 1949 the legislature passed a law designating Old San Juan an “ancient and historical zone,” and in 1955 the effort received a boost when the government created the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, whose architects took command of the task. Under the direction of a young native Puerto Rican and Harvard Ph.D., Ricardo Alegría, the institute provided advice to property owners on structural design, decor, and color. Fomento spurred the process along with tax incentives to building owners who undertook restorations, and the Government Development Bank provided loans to willing proprietors. By 1962 twenty-five major structures, most dating to the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, had been rehabilitated. At night, electrified gas lamps of wrought iron illuminated the shiny, blue-gray cobblestones believed to have been used as ballast on colonial Spanish ships. Soon, the ancient city bustled with up-scale restaurants, gift shops, and tourists – U.S. and Puerto Rican.

Nor did the traveler’s taste for the elemental and the exotic conflict with the worship of modernity. The historian T. Jackson Lears has analyzed the emergence of “anti-modernism” during the late nineteenth century and explained how the bourgeoisie’s embrace of premodern symbols, including those of medieval Catholicism, helped ease adaptation to a more secular, rationalized

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75. Hanson, *Transformation*, 206.
society. By exalting “authentic” experience as an end in itself, antimodern impulses reinforced the shift from a Protestant ethos of self-denial to a consumer ideal of self-fulfillment.\textsuperscript{77} The anthropologist Grant MacCannell has explained that “the best indication of the final victory of modernity over other sociocultural arrangements is not the disappearance of the nonmodern world, but its artificial preservation and reconstruction in modern society.” The maintenance of a reconstructed past, and the separation of rural settings to vacation get-away status, created commodified diversions, or a set of “modern playthings,” which reaffirmed rather than denied the forward march of progress.\textsuperscript{78}

By the second half of the 1950s, Puerto Rico had all the essential elements for tourism in place: an activist government, a modern airport, beaches, hotels, and remnants of the past. It also had an increasingly sophisticated image-making machine that hit high gear after Fomento hired the renowned advertising mogul David Ogilvy to head up its public relations campaign. Sensitive to the tourist’s cultural yearnings, Ogilvy warned against overaccenting Puerto Rico’s industrial ambitions and portraying the island as a “New Deal Formosa.” Instead, he advised: “We must substitute a lovely image of Puerto Rico for the squalid image that now exists.” That meant painting Puerto Rico as a society of history and tradition “in renaissance,” a society that had successfully melded modernity and antiquity.\textsuperscript{79}

Ogilvy’s ads approached artistry. One of his most famous, published in 1958, pictured a young Spanish-looking woman in an evening gown holding flowers and turned toward an ornate colonial-style patio gate. The text read: “Time stands still in the Puerto Rican patio. . . . You might have stepped back three centuries. . . . Can this really be the Puerto Rico everyone is talking about? Is this the island American industry is now expanding to, at the rate of three new plants a week? Is this truly the scene of a twentieth century renaissance?\textsuperscript{80}” The island’s image gained additional brilliance in 1956 when Muñoz and Moscoso persuaded the world famous cellist Pablo Casals to resettle in Puerto Rico, his mother’s homeland. Casals, an expatriate from Franco’s Spain, became the main attraction of the annual Casals Classical music festival each June. The festival enhanced Puerto Rico’s reputation for artistic refinement and wooed northern travelers south during the summer off-season.\textsuperscript{81}

History, modernity, and image-making converged with Cold War politics as neighboring Cuba descended into revolution. While Havana had nurtured a

\textsuperscript{78} MacCannell, \textit{The Tourist}, 8.
\textsuperscript{79} David Ogilvy, \textit{Confessions of an Advertising Man} (New York, 1965).
\textsuperscript{80} Maldonado, \textit{Musica}, 17–18
\textsuperscript{81} “Puerto Rican Travel Newsletter” (San Juan, September 1956), Oficina del Gobernador, box 2037.
tourist boom for over three decades, it had accumulated massive image problems during the 1950s. The authoritarian government of Fulgencio Batista had adopted a free-wheeling, laissez faire policy toward the industry, content to leave matters to private interests, as long as it received its share of casino revenue. Thus, Cuba's capital city had become synonymous with the darker side of tourism: conspicuous consumption, mob controlled gambling, public drunkenness, and rampant prostitution. The incongruities of foreign tourism intensified domestic discontent, fed anti-Yankee sentiment, and undoubtedly contributed to Fidel Castro's communist revolution. In June 1960 Castro's government seized the landmark Havana Hilton, and relations with the tourist industry disintegrated. Completed only a few years earlier, the Havana Hilton was even larger and more ornate than San Juan's Caribe Hilton, and its closure marked the end of an era.82

As Castro cast his shadow across the Caribbean, Washington officials and the press heaped more praise than ever on Puerto Rico's "peaceful revolution." Unlike other Caribbean countries, the Saturday Review editorialized in 1962, Puerto Rico had no revolutionary past. The island was managed pragmatically and in accordance with democratic principles.83 "Under way here is an American-style revolution that really works," observed U.S. News and World Report, that stood "in sharp contrast to the violent revolution in nearby Cuba."84 At the center of it all was Muñoz Marín, the "poet statesman" whose picture graced the cover of Time in June 1958.85 Guidebooks and travel articles praised the Puerto Rican "success story," and Muñoz's Tourist Bureau increasingly made the island's economic progress, and the contrast to Cuba, a selling point.86 "Mañana means tomorrow, but it also means future. . . . Puerto Rico has shed the mañana complex," one ad announced, and a battery of mortality, literacy, and production statistics followed.87

86. Travel, April 1961, 22–25; Hanson, Transformation; Hancock, Puerto Rico; Aitken, Poet in the Fortress; Adolph Berle, "Policy By the Sea," Saturday Review, 17 October 1964, 40–41; Gruber, Island of Promise, 265–64. Gruber's book, published as both a journalistic account and a travel guide, articulated as well as any Puerto Rico's special attraction. The Herald Tribune writer described Puerto Rico as a nation with which the United States shared a spiritual bond. Its political system was based on constitutional principles and a respect for human dignity. Its social programs, such as the rural housing program where the government provided materials and the recipients the labor, were based on self-help. One chapter drew analogies between Puerto Rico and Israel: "new democracies on old soil, pulling themselves up by their bootstraps, with strong and emotional ties to the United States."
Puerto Rico also won support from leading U.S. politicians. Richard Nixon found refuge there in 1958. The following year presidential hopeful Senator Hubert Humphrey (D-MN) visited the island and lauded it as a model for liberal development in the Third World. President Dwight D. Eisenhower, perhaps the nation’s most famous vacation enthusiast, made Puerto Rico the first stop on his Latin American tour in February 1960. Ike captured headlines and added further to the island’s luster when he took to the fairways of the recently opened, Rockefeller-owned Dorado Beach Club, east of San Juan.

John F. Kennedy forged the strongest bond. In December 1958 he visited the island and made his first major speech on Latin America as a presidential candidate. Following his election he picked two of Muñoz’s closest associates, Teodoro Moscoso and Arturo Morales Carrión, to serve on a task force on Latin American affairs and later appointed each to high-ranking administration positions. When the young president made his first trip to Latin America in December 1961, Puerto Rico topped the itinerary. A few weeks later JFK and first lady Jacqueline Kennedy hosted “Puerto Rico night” at the White House. A tribute to Muñoz, the gala included a state dinner, a Pablo Casals concert, and crowd pleasing bilingual introductions by Mrs. Kennedy.

Cuba’s turmoil also catapulted Puerto Rico into a leadership position among Caribbean vacation retreats as the number of annual visitors climbed steadily. The commonwealth government rushed to meet the demand with another spate of hotel construction. The government-owned La Concha in the Condado opened in 1958 and guests marveled at its seashell shaped nightclub set by surf’s edge. Shortly after the La Concha’s opening, work began on the four-hundred-room El San Juan, a public-private venture with the Intercontinental Hotel Group, a subsidiary of Pan American. The island’s beach hotels booked for months ahead and the nightclub and restaurant business hummed. Wrote *Time* magazine in December 1958, Puerto Rico is aimed to please the crowd “bored with New York Times, 3 December 1959.

92. Luis Muñoz Marín, oral history interview, 15, Kennedy Library.
Miami and scared of going to Havana because of the Cuban revolution.\textsuperscript{94} U.S. 
\textit{News and World Report} observed that hotel space “was so short that some hotels 
put up cots in lobbies for new arrivals.”\textsuperscript{95} By 1964 the number of American 
tourists reached five hundred thousand; and five years later it surpassed the one 
million mark, second only to Mexico in Latin America.\textsuperscript{96}

While the commonwealth’s offerings wowed most Americans, the tourist 
binge and capitalist modernity raised an array of new challenges for Puerto 
Ricans. Just as hotel construction transformed San Juan’s physical landscape, 
the inundation of North Americans and modern, consumer-based lifestyles 
disrupted class, race, and gender relations across the island and raised funda-
mental questions of cultural identity. The Muñoz administration of course 
touted tourism as a boon to economic development and a source of prestige. 
Many Puerto Ricans agreed. Yet as the foreign presence grew and spread out 
across the island, and more Puerto Ricans rubbed shoulders with the pleasure 
seekers in hotels and restaurants and on the island’s beaches, ambivalence 
toward tourism grew.

Part of the tension arose from economic inequalities. In a less developed 
country, where the technicalities of commonwealth status could not completely 
veil the continuing authority of colonial power, the prospect of using tourism 
to attain economic progress was bound to encounter skepticism. Operation 
Bootstrap’s accomplishments notwithstanding, much of Puerto Rico remained 
desperately poor and the island’s economy, while increasingly industrialized 
and shaped by decisions made in San Juan, had not escaped dependency on the 
United States. U.S.-based companies that took advantage of tax-free induce-
ments often pulled up stakes when moratorium periods ended. Despite rapid 
industrialization, a growing population and the vagaries of the marketplace kept 
unemployment at 10 to 12 percent, figures that did not consider the added 
problem of partial employment. Government studies verified, moreover, that 
U.S. tourists were an unusually affluent clientele, drawn mainly from the eastern 
United States (especially New York, New Jersey, and Florida), with annual 
incomes of $10,000 or more, in the upper quintile for U.S. wage earners and at 
sharp variance with salaries of Puerto Rican workers.\textsuperscript{97}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{94} \textit{Time}, 1 December 1958, 31.
\item \textsuperscript{95} \textit{US News and World Report}, 28 March 1960, 76.
\item \textsuperscript{97} Compelling critiques of Operation Bootstrap can be found in Dietz, \textit{Economic History}, 340–450; Morley, “Dependence and Development in Puerto Rico,” in López, ed., \textit{The Puerto Ricans}, 171–211; and Weisskoff, \textit{Factories and Foodstamps}. On the incomes of the U.S. tourists see Marco A. 
Rigau (Ayudante Ejecutivo del Gobernador) a Sra. Belen C. Brown (Fomento), 10 Febbrero 1953, 
Oficina del Gobernador, box 2017, APGR; “The Effectiveness of Travel Advertising,” \textit{The Puerto 
Rican Visitor’s Bureau}, 31 January 1972, Oficina del Gobernador, box 2018; and “The Tourism 
box 143.
\end{itemize}
No issue better illustrated the intersection between tourism and class structure than the continuous effort to remove the inhabitants and demolish the infamous slum dwellings of “La Perla.” Perched along the rockbound shore adjacent to Old San Juan, the neighborhood was immortalized by the sociologist Oscar Lewis’s study of Puerto Rican poverty La Vida. As early as 1949 government tourist planners had recommended clearance of the area, but community organizers mobilized and political pressure prevented action. La Perla clung to its slope alongside the tourist districts. The prostitute Soledad in La Vida related how her work and travels took her back and forth from ghetto to stylish Condado and spoke of “the pain one feels after being in a nice hotel and walking past the Caribe Hilton” only to return home to the nearby slum. “They live in separate worlds, the poor and the rich,” she observed.

Economic disparities constituted only one of many irritants. As the flood of tourists mounted, denunciations of “cultural imperialism” echoed across the island. In an article in El Mundo Professor Severo E. Colberg of the University of Puerto Rico voiced the concerns of many who identified with the independentista movement and the left wing of the PPD. “Through ‘tourist mania’ we are falling prey to foreign speculators,” he warned. “Puerto Rico may become a paradise for visiting tourists, but alien to native peoples.” Many city residents complained of overbuilding, congestion, and crime in the Condado, and by the mid-1960s began to express concern over the environmental impact of tourism on San Juan’s coastline. Others resented the often loud and overbearing demeanor of vacationing North Americans. The independentista organ Claridad regularly featured satirical cartoons with Yankees in classic tourist attire (bermuda shorts, flowered dresses, straw hats, and cameras) demanding to be treated like royalty. One Spanish-language cartoon depicted a tour group, obviously ignorant of imperial history, making disparaging remarks about Puerto Rico’s Americanized street names and culture while being pulled across town by human-drawn rickshaw.

Particularly abrasive was the tourist’s disregard for the Spanish language. Under U.S. colonialism, Puerto Ricans had deeply resented the imposition of English in government and education. At the onset of the commonwealth era Spanish was reinstated as the island’s official language, but tourism seemed to again threaten its dominance. “The trouble with you Americans,” one correspondent addressed the English language Puerto Rico World Journal, “is that when

102. For example, see Claridad, Enero 1959, March 1960, January 1960.
you come to Puerto Rico you want to be understood in your own language, but don't give a damn to learn our language.” Governor Muñoz on one occasion wrote the Hilton's managers about a recent trip to the Castellano Hilton in Spain where he noticed menus printed in Spanish as well as English. Could a similar practice be implemented in San Juan? Such a menu, he observed, would not only be convenient for a bilingual society, but would also provide tourists a point of interest. Hilton menus, however, remained English only. Responding to the Puerto Rico World Journal correspondent, an American observed that the island’s use of U.S. currency accorded him special language rights. Until the commonwealth minted its own coins, he lectured, you “better damn well learn the language of the country that feeds you.”

104. Carlos M. Passalacqua (general manager, Fomento) to William Land (general manager, Caribe Hilton), 6 October 1955, Oficina del Gobernador, box 2039.
Of all the cultural affronts that accompanied tourism, few touched as sensitive a chord as racism. Although Puerto Rican society had never been free of racial prejudice, especially in upper class circles where interracial marriages were shunned, the island had no history of rigid, racial separation. Introduced to Puerto Rican military units after the U.S. takeover of the island at the turn of the century, tourism threatened to extend Jim Crow across society. In late 1949 when rumors swirled that the Caribe Hilton would implement the color bar, the Marxist Puerto Rico Weekly Libre greeted the hotel’s opening with a front page illustration of the impressive new building in the likeness of a battleship flying a large flag that read “Jim Crow.” The Caribe in fact did not adopt the practice, but reports surfaced periodically that other hotels and inns did so. The American ex-patriate journalist Earl Parker Hanson reported in 1955 that, while most of San Juan’s hotels accepted African-American customers for accommodations and meals, a number of hotel beaches prohibited black sunbathers and swimmers.

While the Hilton remained an integrated facility, management’s dissatisfaction with its workforce at times gave way to racist generalizations about Puerto Rican character. After attending the grand opening of the Caribe, Carl Hilton wrote a scathing letter to his brother Conrad. The native workers, he complained, seemed to have a warped view of service, exhibiting little sense of timing and discipline. The hired “peons” were “child-like or even dog-like; it is not what you say when directing their efforts it is your tone of voice that counts.” At the same time, Hilton theorized that islanders suffered an “inferiority complex” that made them extremely sensitive to criticism and prone to “quit and sulk.” “It may be better to pay them weekly rather than twice a month,” he advised, “because two weeks pay is a hell of a lot of dough for one of those ‘pelaos’ to hold in his hands; it may cause him to think he won’t have to work again for a long time.”

Most Puerto Ricans did not work in the travel industry, and due to government planning and the pricey atmosphere, tourist districts remained outside the daily lives of most natives. Yet tourism did bring Yankees and locals together in the intimate setting provided by the beach. In a country alive with populism, proposals to privatize the coastline always constituted, as one government official put it, “a very delicate matter.” By the mid-1960s private beach rights had been ceded to only three hotels: the Caribe Hilton and the Condado Beach Hotel in San Juan, and the Rockefeller controlled Dorado Beach complex just east of the capital city. Thus, at seaside Yankees and Puerto Ricans observed
their contrasting attitudes and behaviors toward dress, modesty, sexuality, and gender. At times the encounter proved explosive.

Although popular tourist literature historically depicted Puerto Rico as an alluring and welcoming female, U.S. visitors, particularly women, frequently encountered the island’s patriarchal hierarchy and cult of machismo. Most common were complaints of sexual harassment, assaults, and rapes on the beaches. The Condado beachfront, one letter writer to an island newspaper complained, had become a meeting ground for “degenerates” who “are exposing themselves, masturbating, saying ugly, filthy things to women, beat[ing] up women, stealing, and making a general nuisance of themselves.” Male chauvinism and sexism were frequently cited problems at beachside in the United States as well. Still, some Puerto Ricans struck a defensive tone as established sexual mores encountered more modern and less restrictive North American attitudes. In a letter to the English-language *Island Times*, one Puerto Rican woman expressed disgust at the American women who walk the beaches alone in “tight bathing suits” and then complain of being harassed: “Do Puerto Rican gentlemen let their women walk on the beaches alone,” she asked. The answer no was accompanied by a lecture: “Remember, you are a guest and a foreigner in this country and therefore abide with the customs and culture.”

Other commentators turned their sights on the sexual prerogatives exercised by male vacationers. Puerto Rico never achieved the fame accorded to Cuba as a free zone for sexual license. Indeed, government surveys indicated that the vast majority of American tourists were married and came to the island as couples. North American men – businessmen, tourists, and sailors – were nonetheless often observed in the company of prostitutes. The Condado became a well-known meeting ground, and Puerto Ricans and tourists alike complained of the overt solicitation of sex outside bars and casinos. A male staff writer for *El Mundo* decried how few U.S. tourists understood the accepted place of the prostitute in Puerto Rican male culture, which tolerated within limits discreet extramarital relationships for men. Americans, he complained, once removed from the constraints of their society, openly and randomly sought “women of the streets.”

Other contributors to the editorial pages noted with alarm the presence of homosexuals in the Condado. Puerto Rico had developed one of the few gay scenes in the Caribbean, beginning in Old San Juan in the 1950s. As tourism flourished, a small homosexual subculture of hotels, restaurants, and clubs arose that catered mainly to North Americans. Although most Puerto Ricans seemed willing to tolerate the subculture, it conflicted with the island’s dominant

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Catholic, patriarchal value system. One concerned citizen, who identified himself as a descendant of an old Spanish family, lamented the turning of the capital into a “slum, a haven for all kinds of undesirable characters,” including “the tight pant wiggle-walking homosexuals and their counterpart, the lesbians, with their ‘I don’t give a damn’ behavior.” One derogatory cartoon in Claridad in 1960 highlighted two fashionably dressed young men, standing outside a flashy Condado nightclub, poised for a romantic embrace.

On the surface, it appears that Puerto Rican critics viewed tourism as an invasionary force bent on imposing its customs on the besieged island. Closer analysis, however, suggests a more complicated and ambiguous intercultural and intracultural conflict. In the context of global modernity, tourism involved not so much the forced acceptance of an intruding culture, as a massive and often impersonal process that eroded the host society’s own coherence. In actuality, tourism generated fears of cultural loss rather than cultural imposition, a disturbing but at least partly consensual change – invited by elected commonwealth officials and many of their supporters. The difference between cultural imposition and cultural loss is critical. For the latter implies a modicum of local participation rather than outright expropriation by colonial agents.

Indeed, while tourism unleashed a pervasive unease across the island, it is striking that anti-tourism sentiment never boiled over into an organized social or political movement. Even as charges of imperialism flew, most Puerto Ricans seemed to develop a love-hate relationship with the industry, decrying the deleterious impact while acknowledging, negotiating, and absorbing the benefits. Puerto Ricans in fact both resisted and accepted tourism, recognizing that while it changed forever many of the familiar terms of life, it also brought employment, revenue, investment capital, and even an opportunity to place their history and culture on display.

For its part, the Muñoz administration regularly used the powers of state to plan and manage the tourist trade and staunchly resisted pressures to lift restraints on its growth. The administration often cited the favorable terms of the Caribe Hilton transaction as an example. While the joint venture handed over day-to-day operation of the hotel to Hilton, it secured actual ownership for the commonwealth government. The final contract, moreover, specified that Hilton would purchase the resort’s furnishings and equipment, cover any losses incurred in the first year’s operation, and be barred from opening a competing hotel on the island. Finally, the arrangements guaranteed the government 66 2/3 percent of the hotel’s gross operating profit. The Hilton Corporation certainly

117. José Raúl Cancio (legal consel) to Gustavo Agrait (executive assistant to the governor), 9 de enero de 1950, Oficina del Gobernador, box 239.
felt that Fomento had driven a hard bargain. Predicting a spectacular success for the hotel, Caribe manager Frank Wangeman wrote to Conrad Hilton just six months after the grand opening: “I think we have a gold mine here. Let’s buy this hotel before they [the Puerto Rican government] realize how prosperous it is going to be.” Muñoz and Moscoso would have nothing of it, and by 1953 the enterprise netted $1 million annually for the government.

Tourism workers also wrung concessions from the industry. A strike at two San Juan hotels, including the Caribe Hilton in early 1955, tested labor’s strength. The strike erupted in January, the height of the tourist season, when relations between Hilton and an American Federation of Labor Federation affiliate collapsed due to disputes over wages, medical and vacation benefits, and overtime compensation. Five hundred workers, including maids, waiters and waitresses, bartenders, and kitchen workers, walked off the job. Tensions mounted as hotel managers accused the strikers, a majority of whom were female in this traditionally sex-segregated industry, of using tacks (“tachuelas”) to deflate tires and sabotage company cars suspected of transporting strikebreakers. The strike organizers accused police of siding with the hoteliers and trying to intimidate them away from the picket lines with threats of physical force.

The Muñoz administration ultimately played a direct role in arbitrating the four-week impasse, persuading Hilton to provide a 2 percent pay raise, a 4 percent increase in medical and insurance benefits, and liberalized overtime pay. Governor Muñoz also personally intervened with local police to reduce the danger of violence. After the dispute had been settled, thankful strikers wrote to express their gratitude, informing Muñoz they were willing “morir por nuestro Gobernador” [to die for our governor]. Hilton workers, moreover, were not necessarily privileged. One decade after the Hilton strike, the commonwealth’s hotel workers ranked as the most highly compensated in the Caribbean, with the highest average earnings per occupied hotel room. Not by coincidence, the island’s hotels also sustained the lowest rate of profits. The power of unions and minimum wage laws, often nonexistent at other tropical tourist haunts, accounted for these conditions.

As tourism flourished, Puerto Ricans found countless ways to assert themselves. Complaints about slow service in restaurants and hotels became commonplace,

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118. Oral history interview with Frank G. Wangeman, 27, HHC; Conrad Hilton to Frank Wangeman, 7 May 1951, HHC, box 4; Conrad Hilton to Guillermo Rodriguez (Puerto Rico Industrial Development Company) 16 March 1951, HHC, box 4.
120. The strike was reported extensively in San Juan’s newspapers including, El Mundo, 22, 24, 26, 29 de enero de 1955; Imparcial 25, 28, 29 de enero de 1955.
121. Memorandum to Gobernador Luis Muñoz Marín, 26 de enero de 1955, Oficina del Gobernador, box 209; Teodoro Moscoso to Luis Muñoz Marín, 28 de enero de 1955, Oficina del Gobernador, box 209.
although few tourists realized the possibility that they were unwitting participants in an ongoing contest between colonizer and colonized, haves and have nots. And while the petty crime that escalated along with tourism may have in many cases carried no particular social meaning, it did serve to rankle the nerves of some vacationers. One traveler wrote to the editors of the *Island Times* that on a trip to the countryside he and his family had stopped in a “quaint village” only to be greeted by “cold stares” from the local inhabitants, tugged at by beggars, who “could not speak a word of English,” and unable to find a suitable restaurant for lunch. They returned to their car, he complained, only to discover a group of teenage boys absconding with the vehicle’s hubcaps.

While the commonwealth government and many of its citizens sought to steer tourism and modernity to their economic advantage, they also grappled with the cultural loss that accompanied globalization. Although vacationers often expected hotels and amenities that depicted the United States as a vanguard for world progress and modernity, the Muñoz administration used tourism to manufacture and communicate a highly idealized concept of Puerto Rican identity – albeit, in the context of empire. The featured presentation of Operation Bootstrap and the island’s economic modernization, both in overseas and domestic media, partly fulfilled the agenda. Government officials, moreover, remained confident that they, not the media they employed, engineered the island’s image as a progressive, modern society. The governor’s office kept a close eye on the Tourist Bureau’s activities, even proofreading brochures to guard against the use of language that might convey a demeaning image of the island. In one case in late 1954 a staff member forwarded a brochure mock-up to Muñoz highlighting the need for revision where Puerto Rico had been described as a U.S. colonial possession rather than a semi-autonomous commonwealth.

The most significant intersection between tourism and Puerto Rico’s drive for self-definition grew out of the activities of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, the agency that coordinated the reconstruction of Old San Juan. As was frequently the case with preservation groups in the United States, the institute’s initial programs and projects showcased Puerto Rico’s European heritage, especially its Spanish-built fortresses, residences, and churches. But by the later 1950s, the institute shifted focus and promoted indigenous Taíno-Indian art forms and Afro-Caribbean culture as well. In the township of Loíza Aldea, the institute’s scholars traced the origins of the popular drum-driven,
dance rhythms known as the “bomba” to the area’s African slave population. Archeological digs elsewhere on the island recovered Taíno artifacts and elements of indigenous art and language that lingered among the rural jíbaros, or Hispanic peasantry. The Taíno population, the pre-Columbian inhabitants of what had once been called Borinqueñ, “island of the brave lord,” had long since vanished, victims of European colonization. But the reconstruction of the distant past facilitated the representation of the island’s culture as a harmonious blending of European, African, and Indian influences. The multicultural heritage gave Puerto Ricans a national identity without actual national sovereignty, no small feat for Muñoz and the PPD.

The PPD’s cultural activists celebrated the new identity, not only as an act of preservation but as a product of invention, sponsorship, and popularization. “Although we are very much interested in preserving our cultural heritage,” institute director Ricardo Alegría observed, “we are even more interested in promoting the culture of Puerto Rico today and in the future.” The programs generated a contentious dialogue between advocates of commonwealth status, statehood, and independence, each of whom advanced competing visions of cultural identity. During the legislative debate over the institute’s establishment, advocates of statehood and their recently reconstituted New Progressive party (PNP) denounced the institute’s “incipient nationalism,” dismissed the panning off of peasant handicrafts as art, and belittled the promotion of an “invented” past. “Culture is not static,” party leader and future governor Luis Ferré hammered, “but rather culture progresses, and Puerto Rican culture today is a culture that came with roots in Spain and has already grown roots in the Anglo-Saxon culture.” Independentistas also opposed the bill, not because they embraced Anglo-Saxon culture, but because they feared the institute would become a powerful propaganda organ for the ruling party.

Once passed, however, the program became enormously popular with Puerto Ricans and tourists alike. Academics and university students, particularly those associated with the Federation of Pro-Independence Students, found through the institute’s projects employment opportunities and a means to resist U.S. colonialism. Indeed, the Muñoz government appointed independentistas to administrative and artistic positions in the organization, co-opting advocates of nationhood and outflanking statehood proponents. Interestingly,

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127. Quoted in Gruber, Island of Promise, 167; Carrión, Puerto Rico, 338–43.
130. Davila, Sponsored Identities, 42.
Muñoz also pedaled the institute’s activities as a means by which to prevent Puerto Rico’s rush toward modernity from degenerating into an empty materialism. Echoing the sentiments of many U.S. social critics, the governor sought a balance between Puerto Rico’s quest for economic growth and its cultural integrity: “The human being should have a passion to be free rather than a passionate wish to be a possessor.”

Meanwhile, premodern peasant music, folk dances, and village art became the backbone of the institute’s activities, culminating in 1969 with the launching of the “National Indigenous Festival.” Old San Juan’s shops filled with wood carved “santos” ( likenesses of the saints), locally crafted musical instruments, and handsewn needlework destined to be carted off by both bargain hunting Yankees and patriotic islanders.

Ambivalence toward tourism remained a fixture of Puerto Rican society. Still, the industry rolled along. In 1969, Fomento estimated that tourism contributed $200 million annually to the gross national product, and that hotels alone had directly created nearly ten thousand jobs. Nor had tourism become a controlling factor in the Puerto Rican economy, ranking as it did below both manufacturing and agriculture as a contributor to national wealth. And if Puerto Ricans and Yankees continued to grate on one another, each also found in tourism an opportunity to forge an identity, to reconnect with their roots, both historical and mythological, and to wrestle with the meaning of modernity.

For the next three decades, under commonwealth and statehood governments alike, Puerto Rico redoubled its promotional efforts and vacationers arrived in ever larger numbers. Islanders continued to debate the merits of their fate, but few could take issue with Teodoro Moscoso who told a conference in April 1961: “In the jargon of the advertising trade, an image has been created; we have emerged from anonymity. That, for a tiny island half way across the Atlantic, is no mean accomplishment.”

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In many ways mass tourism is theater, a dramatic and comedic play in which hosts and guests alike display their self-importance and choreograph their

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131. Time, 1 December 1958, 57.
134. The Development of Tourism in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico 1:31–72; 7:49–53; San Juan Star, 12 May 1973; interview with Carlos Diago, former Puerto Rican Tourism Bureau official and Professor of Business at Sacred Heart University, Santurce, San Juan, Puerto Rico, 10 June 1999.
responses to cultural modernity. Many Americans who traveled to Puerto Rico during the early Cold War years found in the island’s hotels, restaurants, and swimming pools confirmation that global uplift could best be achieved through U.S. consumerism rather than Soviet communism. By the late 1960s Puerto Rico had become synonymous with beachfront luxury, architectural innovation, bootstrap capitalism, anticommunism, and old world charm; a mix of old and new, material and spiritual, the mythic and the trivial. Puerto Ricans also placed on stage an idealized self, at once rooted in a glorified, multicultural past, and looking forward toward a wondrous capitalist future. The manufactured identity grew out of a contentious internal discourse between advocates of commonwealth, statehood, and independence, and without resolving the debate, found wide acceptance across the island.

At the same time, Puerto Ricans and Americans both felt a sense of cultural loss. Despite enormous strides in science, technology, and production, communities at various levels of the modernity scale reel from the speed and magnitude of globalization. The cultural experience of people caught up in the process is often one of confusion, uncertainty, and powerlessness. Puerto Ricans frequently lamented the way tourism threatened their linguistic heritage and undermined traditional gender and race relations. Soledad the prostitute, and undoubtedly others in the service sector, had difficulty fathoming the polarities of wealth and poverty that characterized the visitor-host arrangement. And while most U.S. travelers reveled in the lavishness of San Juan’s Condado, discontented nonconformists expressed disdain toward both tourism and modernity and set off across the island in search of a more pristine yet perhaps unobtainable, personal relationship with an overseas society and its people.

In fact, tourism both reinforced and undermined U.S. and Puerto Rican identities. It globalized culture, blurred the line between inside and outside, and demonstrated the fragility of national identity in a mobile world. Given the elaborate play acting, it is not surprising that some scholars have misread tourism’s impact. At one level, Puerto Rico seemed to have blindly accepted North American prescriptions for political status, economic development, and tourism. U.S. leaders heralded the commonwealth as a model for non-Communist development, and travel agents directed hundreds of thousands of vacationers there. At the same time, critics condemned the island’s tourism industry as a form of predatory imperialism. Both views downplayed the economic and cultural tug-of-war that took place between North American travelers and their Puerto Rican hosts over matters of investment, wages, language, race, class, and gender. Both overlooked how the travel industry allowed Puerto Rico to assert its power, manipulate U.S. hegemony, and communicate its existence.

The industry, of course, does not operate the same way in any two countries. In the Caribbean-Atlantic alone, a number of cases contrast sharply with the Puerto Rican experience. In 1950s Cuba the underlying forces that generated tourism – capital, technology, and advertising – were allowed to careen freely, without regulation, and in the end unleashed a violent backlash. In many other
Caribbean republics, entrepreneurs need not comply with minimum wage laws or negotiate with unionized hotel workers, and labor suffers the consequences. Puerto Rico under the politically astute Muñoz Marín administration demonstrates how, within boundaries, government can restrain, plan, and direct tourism toward socially constructive ends.

Tourism studies in one sense confirm the cliche that we live in a small world. International leisure travel became possible on a large scale only after World War II with the advent of modern air travel, the extension of global communications, and the integration of the world capitalist economy. All these developments shrank the planet, linked humanity together, and unhinged familiar societal patterns. Yet while modernity may constitute our ultimate fate, the world remains a large, expansive place, where cultural and national differences survive and are even reinvented as they collide, clash, and mesh. The post-industrial world is riddled with contradictions. It is a world in which corporate multinationals extend their reach and accumulate unprecedented profits, yet smaller, local businesses and governments are capable of capturing a share of the booty. It is a world where great powers still dominate, yet weaker, dependent states can play one outside agency against another, and at times “wag the dog.” It is a world in which ethnic and religious differences can produce civil wars of unimaginable bloodshed and suffering, yet one in which tourists can discover and learn to appreciate the planet’s amazing diversity. At bottom, it is a world in which ordinary men and women, travelers and hosts alike, join with government, business, and labor in extending hegemony, blurring national boundaries, and negotiating identities.