

Effects of the Spanish Royal Decree “Cédula de Gracias” of 1815 on Immigration in Puerto Rico, 1810-1930*

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Resumen: A principio del Siglo XIX, Puerto Rico fue un país con un carácter indefinido, un lugar que comenzó con una serie de inmigraciones. El decreto Real de la Corona de España, la Cédula de Gracias de 1815, promovió con tenacidad una política de emigración entre sus ciudadanos en el Continente Sur Americano o Latino América, como, también, en la Madre Patria, España, de refugiados y extranjeros de Europa, América del Norte y la zona del Caribe. El nuevo Puerto Rico que emergió, creado por los inmigrantes durante este siglo, como un productor importante de azúcar en las Américas, surgió de varios linajes: exilados, disidentes, esclavos y ex-esclavos, además, aventureros; así, como, gran cantidad de gente perseguida y vulnerable, ricos y pobres, de economías o regímenes decaídos, como también de luchas y guerras.

Palabras clave: Inmigración, Cédula de Gracias de 1815, Latino América, Venezuela, España, Puerto Rico

Abstract: At the beginning of the 19th Century Puerto Rico was a country without a definite character, a place that started with a series of continuous migrations. The Spanish Royal Decree Cédula de Gracias of 1815 strongly promoted a policy of emigration among its citizens in the Continent, as well in mainland Spain, and of refugees and foreigners from Europe, North America and the Caribbean. The new Puerto Rico that emerged, that immigrants created during the century, as an important sugar producer in the Americas, came from various lineages: exiles, dissenters, slaves and, also, adventurers; many persecuted and vulnerable people, rich and poor, of decayed economies, regimes, and wars.

Key Words: Immigration, Cédula de Gracias, Latin America, Venezuela, Spain, Puerto Rico

Introduction

Immigration from various parts of the world to the Spanish island of Puerto Rico was one of the most significant factors that contributed to the economic development of the country during the 19th Century.

Before the first decade of this century the Island had permanent settlements of immigrants. Once the newcomers got used to the environment and the conditions of the country, they migrated to the Latin American continent. These immigrants knew that commercial flow between Spain and America was more developed in New Spain (Mexico) and Tierra Firme (coast of Venezuela and Colombia) or in the Spanish Continent.

This under-population of Puerto Rico at the time, which prevented agricultural, commercial, and social development, was redressed however, at the end of the 18th Century and during the first decade of the 19th Century with the entrance of French immigrants (Luque, 2005, 123-38). As the Wars of Independence took place throughout the Spanish American colonies in the American Continent, 1808-1826 (Lynch, 1985, 213-54), there were new population movements in the Island, particularly from Venezuela (Marazzi, 1974). In addition, the proclamation of the Royal Decree Cédula de Gracias in 1815 (Coll y Toste, 1914, I, 1-44, XIV, 3-24) provided an incentive for the settlement of other people in Puerto Rico. Through the Cédula, Spain promoted a policy of emigration among its citizens in the Continent as well in mainland Spain in order to alleviate the precarious conditions resulting from its war with France (1810-1815). As an outcome, Puerto Rico began experiencing economic development that led to changes in its economy from a subsistence agricultural one to a commercial one. This, in turn, was to have visible impact on all other aspects of Puerto Rican life. The Cédula encouraged the entry of highly trained and "well to do" groups to an Island which at the time had limited stimuli for large scale economic change. The new immigrants together with a slave labor force were to help to transform Puerto Rican society and its economy into a sugar plantation development oriented to a world market (Coll y Toste, 1914, I, 304-7).

Real Cédula de Gracias

The main provisions of the Royal Decree Cédula de Gracias of 1815 were to accelerate the slow colonization pace of the Island by promoting the settlement of Spanish and foreign immigrants, and to provide asylum to refugees from the Wars of Independence. It was hoped that the provisions would prevent the spreading of revolutionary ideas of political upheaval and the abolition of slavery which were evident throughout the Americas, beginning with the Independence of the thirteen North American colonies from England in 1776, the French Revolution in 1798, and the Haitian Independence from France in 1804. Saint Domingue (Haiti) was during late 18th Century the wealthiest colony, and the greatest sugar producer in America. The Royal Decree also promoted slavery by allowing the entrance of blacks with the immigrants.

It permitted the introduction of a respectable amount of slaves in the Island, openly stimulating a trade without limits principally in the southern coast of Puerto Rico. It allowed: 15 years free of taxation on slaves introduced by immigrants (foreigners and “peninsulares”) at the moment of their entrance in the country; the right to acquire slaves in “friendly” or neutral countries, in Spanish boats or in foreign ones, by paying 6% on the value of each slave; it forbade shipping slaves out of the country without permission of the Crown; after 10 years of the entrance of the slave, the owner had to pay a one “peso” government tax/slave. The governor of Puerto Rico at the time, General Miguel de La Torre, a military official who had participated in the revolution in Venezuela, expressed the concerns of the colonial authorities, that we should "keep a close vigilance on the political state of the country so, as, to protect it from (political) fires which are burning in Venezuela and prevent the occurrence of the events in Santo Domingo" (Scarano, 1984). We cannot doubt the fact that another goal of Spain’s immigration policy, in encouraging the entry and settlement of newcomers, was to increase the number of whites in the country to avoid what had happened in Haiti.

Southern Coast of Puerto Rico

At the beginning of the 19th Century, the central sector of the town of Ponce at the southern coast of Puerto Rico was inhabited mostly by poor people, with few

establishments and houses surrounding the central public “plaza” which served as a recreational site as well as a commercial one. In the countryside there were only straw shacks (“bohíos”) and not many big wooden houses. The population of the area was around seven thousand people and most of them lived in the rural zone. Puerto Rico, at the time, had a total population of around 160,000 people (De Córdova, 1968, V, 126, IV, 158-61, 338-60). There were hardly any literate persons. This incident, however, was a rather common one at the time in the Caribbean Islands as well as in Europe itself. So, it was under these circumstances that the economic and social development of the southern region took place.

In 1810, the governor of the Island, Brigadier Salvador Meléndez Bruna, following the policy established by the Spanish Crown, invited Venezuelans to settle in Puerto Rico. From 1809 to 1837, the Island was to be governed by three officials who had resided in Venezuela: Meléndez Bruna (1809-1820), who had strongly opposed the Venezuelan independence cause; Francisco González de Linares (1822-1824), first civil governor of Puerto Rico, a rich businessman in Caracas, since 1805, who had lost his fortune during the Venezuelan movement to overthrow the new government, “Junta de Caracas” (Cruz Monclova, 1970, I, 18-102; Álvarez Freites, 1964, 59; Lucena Salmoral, 1984, 27-8), and Miguel de La Torre (1822-1837), the general who was defeated by Simón Bolívar in the Battle of Carabobo in 1821, the last battle fought in Venezuelan territory (Cruz Monclova, 1970, I, 139, 175-222; De Córdova, 1968, IV, 159-69).

As the revolutions on the Latin American countries succeeded in the Wars of Independence from Spain, a notable flow of people mainly from Tierra Firme entered the Island who were Spanish citizens. The majority were land-owners, who belonged to the Creole noble class, military officials, businessmen, physicians, bureaucrats, lawyers, political refugees and clergymen. They were all running away from the uprisings that had on-furled on the mainland. In addition, deserters and political prisoners, as General Francisco de Miranda, also arrived in Puerto Rico only to be sent as a prisoner to the military fort El Morro Castle. Many of the immigrants established themselves in the southern region, together with the Spanish emigrants from the Península, mainly Catalonians who wanted to escape from the Napoleonic Wars and the poor economic

conditions in Spain at the time. (Coll y Toste, 1914, VI, 317; Cifre de Loubriel, 1964; Cifre de Loubriel, 1975). Also, Venezuelans came from the neighboring islands, like Saint Thomas, which served as a stopping point prior to the entry in Puerto Rico.

The Island of Saint Thomas

From the beginning of the 19th Century, the Danish Island of Saint Thomas had become the most important commercial center for Puerto Rico as well as for the rest of the Caribbean (Westergaard, 1917, 141-162). Since St. Thomas was close to the southern coast, it served as transfer point for those emigrants who wished to settle in Puerto Rico (Sonesson, 1973). As mentioned earlier, many of the Venezuelans coming to Puerto Rico stopped temporarily in St. Thomas and thus established commercial connections with the businessmen there and with the representatives of well-known American and European firms. As an example, we can cite Mr. Antonio González, who was the commercial agent in Ponce of the Casa Acevedo & Pardo, one of the most prestigious firms in St. Thomas (AGPR, PNP, fs. 130-131).

The macuquina monetary unit

The introduction of the “macuquina” in Puerto Rico by Venezuelans and its acceptance as the monetary unit for the country by the Spanish government contributed to the solution of the money crisis which had assailed the Island at the turn of the century. It replaced the Spanish silver coins of the Situado that were sent as subsidy from Mexico every year before the revolution had started. The “macuquina” currency was introduced in order to facilitate the immigration of people from Venezuela (Coll y Toste, 1914, VI. 317, III, 225). This specie increased as Venezuelans continued to arrive in the Island and became the official currency used in the country, and the basis for exchange. At the beginning, the “macuquina” was very convenient as the business men preferred it to the unaccepted paper Spanish money. But, later on, its low value became a threat to the silver Spanish specie that circulated in Puerto Rico (González Vales, 1978). The “macuquina” silver, very worn out, though made of valuable metal, was not accepted by many foreign countries, such as the United States, France and England. However, this monetary unit

greatly accelerated the emigrant flow from Venezuela to Puerto Rico and was used for many years, until 1857 (González Vales, 1974, 1978).

The Black Slaves

The majority of the immigrants brought along their slaves. The slaves were usually either from the Caribbean islands, especially from the French colonies (Guadeloupe and Martinique) or from Venezuela. They preferred to transfer them to Puerto Rico and sell them before they could escape back to the Continent. This pattern permitted the landowners to enter with their valued property while at the same time preventing the slaves from joining the revolutionary armies. With the profits made from slave re-sales, the immigrants became involved primarily in agriculture or commerce, and slave trading. Mr. and Mrs. José M. Quesada followed this trend and sold their slaves as soon as they arrived from Venezuela (AGPR, PNP, fs. 151, 159-60, 252-53, 1818. AGPR, PNP, fs. 128-9, 1819, 1era. Pieza).

Immigration Flow

Migration from Tierra Firme continued well in the 1820's. As a result funds were needed; donations from the general public were requested, fixed taxes on municipalities were set, and bureaucratic and military posts were reserved for the newcomers. The immigrants enjoyed employment and protection rights, unemployment benefits as well, as, pensions for widows and children. A provision of the Law of 1813 (Cruz Monclova, 1970, I, 55) offered free grants of land to them. These land grants in Puerto Rico were among others, a major stimulus for the entry of Venezuelans emigrants to the Island. In addition to these privileges, there were other special concessions offered as means to deal with their maintenance (AGPR, PNP, 1821-1837). Many of them became employees of the municipal postal service, audit offices, custom houses, treasury department, and the military division, such as chiefs of military troops, like Colonel Julián Villodas (Newman Gandía, 1913, 50). Venezuelans who did not fall into any of the previously mentioned professions and had a job at the Island would get half their former salaries in bonus.

As late as 1821, a group of 800 refugees from Venezuela and the Garrison of Cumaná, which had been defeated in the revolutionary wars, arrived at the Ponce harbor. It included the Commander Ángel Laborde, four captains, six high-ranked officers, and five hundred ninety seven civilians (Cifre de Loubriel, 1964). A total of eight hundred people who had surrendered themselves during the war arrived from Puerto Cabello harbour in Costa Firme. Even though a majority of the refugees brought money and slaves along in order to settle, many had lost their belongings in the Continent. This meant that upon entry they could not contribute to their self support or to their families. It caused an overall discontent on the southern population. The native Puerto Ricans (“criollos”) and the long-time residents or “peninsulares” (Spanish people from the Península or Spain) and foreigners resented the arrival of the newly admitted refugees who rapidly obtained the best positions in the Island with the same pay as they used to get back in their country. Old time foreign residents felt the same way towards the newcomers since they constituted another source of agriculture as well as business competition. As the Venezuelan Commander Alejandro Ordóñez, who upon his arrival in 1815, was named Officer of the Treasury and Deputy District Justice for Coamo. Two years later, he became the Mayor of Ponce (AGPR, PNP, f. 37, 1816).

In effect, a "peaceful" invasion of numerous emigrants and refugees was taking place. However, the newly arrived ones participated in many aspects of the development of the country. Together with the established foreign residents they soon assumed control of the sugar production and export, the commercial business loans and the financing of plantations, and the slave trade (Pérez Vega, 2015).

In Ponce as in Caracas, the majority of the export trade was in the hands of commercial firms owned by Europeans and Venezuelans (Carvallo et al, 1979, 43, 9), as: Ferdinand Overman and William Voigt from Germany, the Archbald Brothers from Ireland, and the Frenchmen Gaspar Duprel (pharmacist) and Robert Proust (physician) connected with the slave trade in Martinique, and the export sugar trade to St. Thomas, U.S., and Europe. The explanation can be stated according to our hypothesis in that, it was not precisely the Spaniards from the Península who had the most capital nor did they have the most experience. Instead, foreigners and Venezuelans had the most experience and capital

and they were to provide the initiatives for the early agricultural and commercial development of the region.

The wealthy and experienced immigrant was the privileged one on commerce, thus becoming the loan center for all the needy, since there was not a banking system in Puerto Rico (Cruz Monclova, 1970, III, 238; Santiago de Curet, 1978). An example was the Venezuelan business firm Quesada: José María and his two sons, José M. and Eustaquio (AGPR, PNP, fs. 234-236, 1828) The father, a captain of the regional military infantry of Nueva Barcelon, Venezuela, arrived in 1819, accompanied by his wife María del Rosario Pérez, with capital and slaves, immediately settled in the southern region. His off-springs arrived from the Continent seven years later, in 1826 (AGPR, FGE, 1814-67, 1873) and joined their father's business. By 1827, Quesada had become one of the wealthiest men in Ponce and was able to give his daughter Eustaquia 2,500 silver pesos as dowry for marriage (AGPR, PNP, fs. 108-10, 1827) which, at the time, was considered a very high donation.

Later, Eustaquio Quesada successfully established another commercial company at a warehouse in the center of the town of Ponce, with Olegario González, a Venezuela landowner who had arrived in 1818 (AGPR, FGE, Lista de los vecinos blancos, 1836). Besides being involved in wholesale trade, they also devoted themselves to the management of a loan business (Pérez Vega, 2015, 378-9).

There were scarcely any Spaniards and Venezuelans, who associated themselves with foreigners. We can find very few examples other than José M. Quesada (son) and Gregorio de Medina. Medina, a Spanish merchant who had been in Venezuela, became a wealthy businessman and planter in Ponce, and one of the few voters in the Island (Pérez Vega, 1985, 73). He was associated with the American slave trader Arthur Rogers from Boston (AGPR, PNP, fs. 5-7, 1826). Medina wanted to retire from his commercial-agriculture concerns thus leaving his associate and son-in-law Arthur Rogers, in charge of his Hacienda Vayas, the second most productive in the area. Gregorio de Medina, a native of the Canary Islands, first went to Venezuela where he engaged in commerce. However, because of the revolutionary disruptions in the country, he fled to Puerto Rico

with his family in 1811, and settled in Ponce in 1816. Medina arrived with his wife Francisca de la Cruz Artuzo, five children and a female slave. By 1820 he owned the sugar hacienda and became Ponce's second mayor (Pérez Vega, 1985, 73-4. 82-3).

José M. Quesada (son), businessman and property owner, associated with another foreign merchant, Thomas Davidson from Baltimore (Maryland), landowner and slave trader. Together they ran the Hacienda Paradise Estate, one of the largest and most productive in the area. Within a short time, Quesada became its sole owner, (AGPR, PNP, fs. 354-59, 615-18, 1829; fs. 98-99, 1830) and of another plantation in Ponce (AGPR, PNP, fs. 557-61, 1828). In 1826 Davidson became the United States Consul in Ponce (Despachos de los Cónsules, I, 1832).

The wealthy Venezuelan immigrants ("peninsulares" or "criollos") had no interest in associating with the Spanish businessmen and landowners, long-time residents of Ponce. As a result, the contacts between members of these groups remained limited. The new colonists moved directly to buy land, having evaluated the best properties and available lands with favorable production prospects. They purchased and easily developed the promising capacity of the plantations. This was possible because of the money they had brought along, their commercial contacts in the Caribbean, the Continent, Spain and in foreign countries, all of which allowed them facilities to obtain credit.

In general, the Venezuelan emigrant, as well as the foreigner, would bring money, his personal effects, slaves, farming equipment and merchandise to enter into business transactions immediately after arrival. Thus, it became rather easy for him to settle without any difficulty. His economic stability together with his advantages associated with Spanish citizenship in the colony and the Spanish language, helped him to immediately establish himself in commerce, an activity which was prohibited to foreigners. The foreigners (French, English, North American, German, Irish, Italian, and Corsican) were not permitted to associate with Spanish citizens in commerce or to establish a store in the city but they could purchase land properties and haciendas, so, got the best in the region because they had the cash money to buy them.

Venezuelan immigrants were rather different from the “peninsulares”. First, the former were generally older besides, they would come with their families and relatives. They obtained the best housing in Ponce, and bought big farms or haciendas, since they had been planters in their native land. Many of them had been owners of important major or minor businesses. An example of this type of emigrant was Antonio González, who was born in Galicia, Spain but had been living in Venezuela for a long time (AGPR, PNP, f. 190, 1821). He had been a teacher in Caracas but had fled the revolution and arrived in Puerto Rico in 1816 (AGPR, FGE, Emigrados, 1815-37,). This was the case of a professional educator who became a merchant. A similar case was that of the town physician Domingo Arévalo from Caracas (Actas del Cabildo, No. 2, 1817-19). In Venezuela he worked as the second ranking surgeon at the Military Hospital of the Artillery Corps; in 1814 he was the surgeon of the Second Battalion in La Guaira (Vargas, 1960). He arrived in San Juan in 1817, but moved to Ponce a year later in response to a call to take care for the victims of a smallpox epidemic that was spreading in the district. Both, González and Arévalo were attracted by the town's economic development. The former became a prosperous businessman and Arévalo an important planter, while also continued practicing as a physician (Pérez Vega, 2009).

One of the first immigrants from Venezuela to enter the Island was Salvador Blanch, a businessman of Catalonian origin, who was appointed to the customs house and the harbor "captainship". By 1830, he had become the administrator of the Hacienda Quemado owned by the Creole Puerto Rican personality and clergyman José Gutiérrez del Arroyo, who had arrived from Caracas in late 18th Century (Pérez Vega, 1985, 58). This plantation was the main sugar producer in Ponce and probably in Puerto Rico.

I must also mention Salvador de Vives who arrived with his wife Isabel Díaz, in 1821, with the Puerto Cabello emigrants. He became the registrar and inspector of the Ponce harbor. Later, he established a coffee plantation, Hacienda Buena Vista, which got the reputation as the most developed in the territory. In 1840 he was the mayor of Ponce (AGPR, FGE, Cuaderno de la riqueza, 1845).

Another group of "distinguished Venezuelan" emigrants were Ana María Ordóñez y Ramírez, from the Cumaná aristocracy and widow of the Venezuelan General Joaquín Alvizu, with her off-springs and her brother, Commander Alejandro Ordóñez (AGPR, Colección Roig, c. 1, expo. 1; AGPR, FGE, Emigrados de Costa Firme). Shortly upon arrival, Doña Ana Ordóñez married the Corsican Pablo Bettini, one of the most important businessmen and landowners in the southern region of Puerto Rico (AGPR, Colección Roig. AGPR, FGE, Extranjeros, c. 91, ent. 28; Cifre de Loubriel, 1962), who was, also, an emigrant from Venezuela.

Other important group was the Vargas Brothers (Joaquín, José María, Miguel, and Bernardino) from La Guaira. They had been persecuted, accused of conspiracy, and captured by the royalist groups (those against the independence of Venezuela, thus favoring the Spanish Crown) in Caracas. After the fall of the first Venezuelan Republic (1812), they had to emigrate (Bruni Celli, 1986.; Eloy Blanco, 1947). In 1813, José María Vargas went to Europe to continue his studies in medicine, following his liberation during Bolívar's occupation of La Guaira. Later, his brothers migrated to Puerto Rico (AGPR, Tribunal de Justicia Mayor, 1830-49). As a result of the vicissitudes that befell in Venezuela with the fall of Bolívar in 1814, many civilian and military leaders were forced into exile. Paradoxically, Puerto Rico also had an immigration of Venezuelan patriots, who favored independence.

The Vargas Brothers arrived in Ponce in 1817-1818 introducing slaves. They purchased a sugar cane hacienda, Caño de los Jueyes, and later a general store in town. In a few years they established a mercantile-agriculture association with Anduze & Gil Co. from Saint Thomas. It became an important enterprise as the company provided the Vargas with the capital for the development of the land (Pérez Vega, 2001) José M. Vargas went to San Juan in 1818 becoming one of the most prominent surgeons at the military hospital and professor of medicine and surgery at the same hospital (Cuesta Mendoza, 1948). Besides, being a general surgeon, he was an ophthalmologist, obstetrician and pathologist. He had pursued his specialties in Edinburgh and London. He was also a member of the Economic Society of Puerto Rico, described as a person of "outstanding character, socially and culturally", and who "demonstrated an impeccable moral as well

as political conduct". He was responsible for introducing the smallpox vaccine from Venezuela through Saint Thomas to Puerto Rico (Actas del Cabildo, 1817-19, Actas No. 102, 109; Arana Soto, 1974).

However, José M. Vargas, nor his brothers, was seen as subversive by the authorities of the Island. The explanation for this could be the fact that the four or five years that he spent in Europe could have helped him to conceal his true identity as a believer for the independence of Venezuela, before the local authorities; or he pretended to be a loyal subject to the Spanish Crown. In 1825, following the final victory of Ayacucho (Venezuela) in 1824 by Antonio Sucre, Vargas "escaped" from Puerto Rico back to Caracas, probably after been uncovered and denounced by Governor Miguel de La Torre. Five years later, in 1830, Vargas became the first President of the Universidad Central de Venezuela in Caracas. He established the School of Medicine at the University, and the public education system for his country (AHN, Ultramar, 1831-1898).

During that time, José María Vargas was one of the two delegates for the Constituent Congress that took place in Valencia (Venezuela) which opposed Bolívar's expulsion from his post as President of Venezuela. He became will executor for the Liberator (Simón Bolívar) on his death in 1830. Five years afterwards, in 1835, Vargas was elected the first civilian President of the Republic of Venezuela, following General José A. Páez' administration (Pérez Vega, 2017).

Miguel Vargas returned to La Guaira to resettle as a businessman after 1821. He was one of the third-teen merchants established in Caracas in 1786. Bernardino Vargas died rather young and, later, Joaquín (1829) in Ponce. The wife of the latter remarried another Venezuelan, the opulent Joaquín Alvizu, who was the son of the late General Alvizu, mentioned before. This created family arguments over the Vargas' hacienda inherited by the widow (Lucena Salmoral, 1984).

The French *emigré* Agustín Lavarthé, about 30 years old, who lived in La Guaira for many years and was married to Josefa María Vargas Ponce, sole daughter of Dr. José María Vargas, arrived in Puerto Rico in 1829. Lavarthé had previously been in Ponce, representing Damison & Co. from Caracas. In that year, he arrived as a legal

representative of Mrs. Teresa Ponce, elderly and wealthy mother of the Vargas Brothers, who was living in Caracas. She was claiming a fourth of the Vargas' hacienda which had been taken over by the widow of Joaquín Vargas and her recent husband (Pérez Vega, *Actitudes y mentalidades*, 1992). Lavarthé stayed in Ponce, and by 1838 he was in charge of the entire Vargas property.

There were other emigrants who were not as lucky upon their arrival to the Island as those previously mentioned, such as Francisco Farrafa and Manuel Font. They introduced merchandise from Venezuela into the country through their employees. Later, Farrafa and Font arrived in Ponce without money (AGPR, PNP, f. 6, 1827). Apparently, their former employees, Ángel Carbonell and Juan Barnés (Newmann Gandía, 1912), did not allow them to participate in the business they had already established after their arrival in Ponce. This is one of the many dramatic events as a result of the outflow of people especially from Puerto Cabello trying to somehow save a fraction of the goods they had in Venezuela.

We have presented some of the many Venezuelan emigrants who came to Puerto Rico during the time of their country's independence. In general, they kept contact with their congeners settled in San Juan, whom they employed mainly as representatives of their important businesses in the Capital. Some of these personalities and slave traders were: José Xavier de Aranzamendi, the Goenagas, the Carreras, Jaime Dalmau, Pedro Guarch, and Juan de Dios Conde (Campos Esteve, 1976). They were considered as principal merchants in San Juan. Another personality was Juan de Dios Cuebas, attorney at law, who was from Güayana, Venezuela. He, also, came from the Continent and arrived in Ponce in 1818 and, afterwards, went to the Capital (Actas del Cabildo, 1810-12, 1817-19, Acta sin número). Those merchants in San Juan became important sources of credit and slaves to their counterparts in the Island for their commercial and agricultural activities.

Economic profits

A considerable amount of the profits of the merchants or planters emigrating from Venezuela was invested in the purchase of other properties and businesses, slaves, and

for sustaining families living abroad. It was also spent in the construction and furnishing of expensive houses, like that of Gregorio de Medina appraised in 30,000 “pesos” in 1820. This was considered to be very high sum of money at the time (Pérez Vega, 1985). Furthermore, part of these profits was spent for purchasing expensive items and traveling abroad.

The progress made by the southern society was remarkable. As a result, there was an economic and social disengagement leading to a drive for luxurious and refined belongings. As described by the Spanish civil officer Pedro Tomás de Córdova in 1830: "This sector is already beyond the infant agricultural stage. Those living here search for commodities leading to rich owners. One can feel among them the restfulness and luxury provided by wealth and generally the taste for comfort and life's own pleasures" (De Córdova, 1968, IV, 260-1).

Conclusions

The immigrants between 1810 and 1830 brought along with them basic changes for Puerto Rico which provided for the overall development of the Island. As a result, there was a new social and economic life style set by the newcomers settled as landed or as businessmen, in military as well as in governmental and justice positions or in the administration of law, in the urban or in the rural sector.

Those arriving from Venezuela were at the time the most benefited of the Spanish emigrants that came to Puerto Rico. They generally belonged to the upper class. We find among them first magistrates, a future president, clergymen, high rank military officers and clergymen; educated people mastering languages, law, business and agriculture, science, as medicine. As it was expected, they participated in all the main aspects of the economic, social and political life of the region, and belonged to the ruling class in Puerto Rico. They contributed with technical, agricultural, mercantile, administration of justice and scientific knowledge and with a considerable amount of other skills. This, in turn, stimulated progress and economic and social wellbeing in Puerto Rico. They were not responsible for the conservative tendency in the political as well as in the overall sense.

This did not have as a result stagnation in the development of nationalism and liberalism in the country (Picó, 2008, 180; Pérez Vega, (2009), 62).

Synopsis

At the end of the 18th Century and the beginning of the 19th Century Puerto Rico was a country without a definite character, a place that started with a series of continuous migrations. The Spanish Royal Decree Cédula de Gracias of 1815 strongly promoted a policy of emigration among its citizens in the Continent, as well in mainland Spain, and of refugees and foreigners from Europe, North America and the Caribbean. The new Puerto Rico that emerged, that immigrants created during the century, as an important sugar producer in the Americas, came from various lineages: exiles, dissenters, slaves and, also, adventurers; many persecuted and vulnerable people, rich and poor, of decayed economies, regimes, and wars. The process of social and economic blending eventually rendered a “new society”, less rustic with a progressive growth. “Immigrant diversity” made Puerto Rico better, since in large ways it was “essential to its development”. Immigrants that had been outsiders at this destination became a people that proved hesitant to relinquish its differences. Puerto Rico was shaped by many cultures; its nationalism, and its shared identity, were not strong enough, being more economical and political than cultural. With so many backgrounds, long-time residents had to adapt to live with new different peoples, socio-economic classes and cultures, with many versions of principles, of realities, of righteousness, of points of views. The desire of immigrants in Puerto Rico to accept slavery for so long, and their opposition to abolition, finally, brought with it disagreement and discontent (Picó, 2008. Kessner, 2005).

It was agricultural and commercial development, or a combination of other large forces, such as security, fear, ambition, the process that pushed thousands of peoples from their countries during the 19th Century, Europe, Latin America, North America and the Caribbean, towards Puerto Rico, causing a vast transfer of populations. To the ones already settled, the immigrants’ cultures, languages, and folkways were strange and threatening, and for many, signaled the decline of their society and economic interests; the adjustment to the new immigrations was not without ambiguity and difficulty (Picó,

2008; Kessner. 2005). One of the largest groups to arrive was the people from Venezuela who were Spanish citizens. Not only were different from other Latin Americans and Europeans in many ways, and did not seem abandoned or unprepared. There were “the other” (Rabinow, 1991; Todorov, 1984), the strangers, the foreigners, not illiterate, well-to-do, disciplined, but undesirable in the new community because of their noticeable economic and social power. Unlike the foreigners, who came without a family, who did not have the intention to settle in the Island and the majority came only to make money, the Venezuelans, most of them remained in Puerto Rico. The immigrants brought valuable experience and important contributions, with cultural, professional and economic knowledge. The way these immigrants embraced the Island in all its’ aspects, socially, economically and politically, reminds us the words of the Spanish conqueror Hernán Cortés (16th Century) in his communication to the Crown: “the conquest of knowledge” led “to the conquest of power” (Kripner Martínez, 2001, 139). The ones that have knowledge can resist power.

Like other immigrants, they populated Puerto Rico, built its cities, laid businesses, loan centers, and sugar and coffee haciendas, and enriched our culture. Of course they had great benefits: the opportunity for a better life, to enrich themselves and their families, to have the best opportunities, positions and land at their arrivals; to return to their country of origin with their earnings, and if they died the inheritors could take out their fortunes. Certainly, this caused drainage of capital to Puerto Rico’s economy, and irritable friction between social groups, but the great changes and development immigration brought to the country in the long run is un-measurable.

Abbreviations

AGPR -Puerto Rico National Archive

AHN -Spain National Archive

AHP -Ponce Municipal Archive

PNP -Ponce Notarial Records

PNSJ - San Juan Notarial Records

FGE - Records of the Spanish Governors of Puerto Rico

c. – box

ent. – entry

expo – dossier

leg. – bundle

p., f. – page

vol., t. – volume

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AGPR, PNP, fs. 37v, 1816, 2da. pieza.

AGPR, PNP, fs. 75-6, 1817.

AGPR, PNP, fs. 151-2, 159-60, 252-3, 1818.

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Note

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