



## On Hispanic Education:

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### Semana Puertorriqueña

Puerto Rican Week (Semana Puertorriqueña) in this state was inaugurated by the Michigan Puerto Rican Coalition in 1979 when they requested then Governor William G. Milliken to sign an executive declaration recognizing the week that included November 19th as Puerto Rican Week. The declaration stated that the "Puerto Rican communities in Michigan have chosen to commemorate their heritage by dedicating the week of November 18-24, 1979, to a historical and cultural overview of Puerto Rico, in commemoration of November 19, 1493, as its discovery day." Michigan therefore became one of the few states in our nation to officially commemorate the discovery of the island of Boriquén (Borinquen) by Christopher Columbus on his second trip to the Western Hemisphere.

The week in November which includes the date of the 19th, therefore, provides teachers with a prime opportunity to do as the original declaration encouraged all citizens to do—to partake in the educational and cultural activities of Puerto Rican Week and to join in extending our appreciation to those of Puerto Rican descent who have chosen to live in our great state and nation. During this week teachers can take time to highlight the hows and whys as stated in the 1985 Puerto Rican Week proclamation: "Puerto Rican communities in Michigan have long been contributing to the greatness of our Great Lakes State. They have extended a strong and positive influence on American life by sharing their rich cultural heritage, customs, and values. By maintaining their unique cultural identity and Spanish language they have enriched the Hispanic population in the United States and have contributed toward improving the quality of life for all citizens, especially Hispanics, in our state and nation."

Assuming that teachers will adapt their curriculum and instruction to the appropriate grade and ability level of their students (see my article entitled "Curriculum about Hispanics," *El Renacimiento*, September 28/October 25, 1987), during this week teachers should make a special effort to help their students develop a greater awareness and appreciation of Puerto Ricans and Puerto Rico. Fortunately for the classroom teachers, there are numerous references and resources from which to draw upon to achieve this goal. Some examples of such resources are a) *Puerto Rico* by Sister Mary Consuela and Robert Revicki, Division of School Equity, Pennsylvania Department of Education, 1984; b) *Puerto Rican Americans: The Meaning of Migration to the Mainland*, by Joseph P. Fitzpatrick, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1971; c) *Puerto Rico: A Profile* by Kal Wagenheim, New York, Praeger Publishers, 1971; and d) *Teaching Strategies for Ethnic Studies* by James A. Banks, Second Edition, Boston, Allyn & Bacon, Inc., 1979, pages 343-365.

Another very good source of materials about Puerto Ricans for teachers is the Puerto Rico Federal Affairs Administration, 1100 Seventeenth St, N.W., Suite 800, Washington, D.C. 20036, (202) 778-0710. This agency publishes a series of booklets called the Heritage Series

that deal with numerous topics about Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans, such as culture, cuisine, and famous heroes. Teachers wishing to keep up with concerns of Puerto Ricans may subscribe to the newsletter of the National Puerto Rican Coalition, called *NPRC Reports*, available by contacting the Coalition at 1700 K Street, N.W., Suite 500, Washington, D.C., (202) 223-3915.

As teachers plan activities in their classroom for the study of Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans, the following areas of study may be useful for organizing their curriculum and instruction: a) Puerto Rican culture and history between November 19, 1493 and 1898; b) Puerto Rican culture and history since 1898; and c) national statistics about Puerto Ricans. While these areas of study are not exhaustive of the many approaches to organizing the curriculum, they are nevertheless exemplary of what teachers can do in the classroom. Let's discuss.

Puerto Rican culture and history while under the rule of Spain (1493-1898) deserves special treatment due the four hundred years of cultural influence exerted on the peoples of the island and their heritage. Few people are aware of the contributions that the island and peoples of Puerto Rico made due to the fact that they were a major experiment in the eventual colonization of the Western Hemisphere by Spain and other Europeans. The history of Puerto Rico under the rule of Spain makes for an exciting and intriguing classical study of colonization. This era also provides some of the richest source of origins for the study of Puerto Rican music, literature, cuisine, customs, and ethnic identity. No study of Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans should ignore this era.

The subsequent ceding of the island by Spain to the United States under the terms of the Treaty of Paris during 1898-99 starts of the next major era from which to study the "colonization" of Puerto Rico by the United States. The Foraker Act of 1900 which laid out terms for the establishment of a government in Puerto Rico, the Jones Act of 1917 which made Puerto Rican U.S. citizens, and the establishment of the island as a Commonwealth of Puerto Rico on July 25, 1952, are examples of events worthy of studying to determine how well or not Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans have fared under the rule of the U.S.

Another area of study for teachers to undertake in the classroom is the statistical data about mainland Puerto Ricans. Few people know that the U.S. Census does not include the population on the island Puerto Rico into the official count of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. As such, Puerto Ricans make up only about 12 percent or 2,284,000 of the Hispanic population in the U.S.; in Michigan, Puerto Ricans make up only about one percent or 12,425 of the state's Hispanic population. Teachers will also want to show students how Puerto Ricans are distributed in the U.S. by comparing counts of Puerto Ricans in their state with other states. Other statistical data on Puerto Ricans that should be studied and compared to other ethnic groups are demographic and social statistics. The study of such statistics is crucial if we are to better understand the plight and promise of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. today.