

Make Puerto Rico Great Again?

An Analysis of Hurricane Maria Relief Aid in the Context of
United States – Puerto Rico Relations

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Abstract

For more than 400 years, Puerto Rico has been subject to colonialism and imperialism. After being colonized by Spain it became a United States possession in 1898 which it remains today, albeit in the form of a Commonwealth. United States policies shaped Puerto Rico's political and economic landscape with severe consequences for life on the island. This particularly became clear in August 2017 when first Hurricane Irma, but especially Hurricane Maria devastated the island. The current study investigates the role that imperialist policies have played in the federal relief aid after Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico. A content analysis of news items, official documents, and Donald Trump's Twitter messages indicate that imperialist policies – expressed through preferential treatment between states and Puerto Rico, economic constraints and bureaucratic hurdles, and the behavior and language use of the president – indeed inhibited an effective recovery mission on the island. It underscores that imperialism still guides the diplomatic relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico.

1. Introduction

“There is no hope.” Living in the dark literally and figuratively, not being able to inform your loved ones about your conditions, no television to keep you informed, and not having the possibility to store food in a refrigerator. In a documentary, a Puerto Rican man used these words to explain the impact of Hurricane Maria on his life.¹ Puerto Rico – an United States unincorporated territory – has been overshadowed by misery after two hurricanes devastated the island in 2017. On September 6, Hurricane Irma passed the northern shore and although it did not make landfall, heavy rainfall and tropical-storm-force winds made the already fragile infrastructure of the island extremely vulnerable and caused three indirect deaths.² Two weeks later, on September 20, Hurricane Maria was the first category four hurricane in 85 years to make landfall in Puerto Rico.³ The center crossed the island diagonally from southeast to northwest and emerged into the Atlantic Ocean the same day. With maximum winds near 250 km per hour, enormous amounts of rain and subsequent flooding and mudslides, Maria nearly destroyed the island.⁴ Because utility poles and transmission lines were badly damaged, the man in the documentary and nearly all 3.2 million inhabitants of Puerto Rico did not have electricity for months. In fact, by January 2018 electricity had been restored to only 65% of the island.⁵ The power outages and the related difficulties left the man with a significant mental scar. He explained that it was “very difficult to live without water and light,” and that the circumstances made him feel “very depressed” and unable to “endure more time here.” The unbearable living conditions do not correspond with the typical image of Puerto Rico as a tropical paradise. Toppled electricity poles, roads covered by debris and houses without roofs replaced images of white beaches, clear blue water and palm trees.

Next to affecting the mental health of residents, the blackout harshly impacted the relief aid, often with fatal consequences. Operable communications are highly critical for effective disaster operations as it informs what assistance is needed and where.⁶ The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) – which coordinates assistance after disasters – faced persistent

¹ PBS, *Blackout in Puerto Rico*, Documentary. Directed by Rick Young, 2018. <https://www.pbs.org/video/blackout-in-puerto-rico-340ybo/>

² John P. Cangialosi, Andrew S. Latta and Robbie Berg, “Hurricane Irma,” *National Hurricane Center* (2018): 3, 14 and Richard J. Pasch, Andrew B. Penny and Robbie Berg, “Hurricane Maria,” *National Hurricane Center* (2019): 8.

³ Richard J. Pasch et al, “Hurricane Maria,” 2 and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), *2017 Hurricane Season FEMA After-Action Report*, (Washington, DC, 2018), 2. The hurricane is classified according to the Saffir-Simpson hurricane wind scale, which differentiates hurricanes in five categories based on the intensities of their winds.

⁴ Richard J. Pasch et al, “Hurricane Maria,” 2.

⁵ Ibid, 7.

⁶ FEMA, *2017 Hurricane Season*, iii.

challenges due to the outages. It was unable to get information about the severity of the situation and the immediate needs of the population. It furthermore could not access key systems to register survivors for FEMA assistance.⁷ Paper registrations and more than 2,000 resource requests that now had to be reviewed, signed, scanned and manually entered into FEMA's systems caused unwanted delays in the rescue mission.⁸ It is not unimaginable that the delays contributed to the more than 2,000 direct and indirect deaths that Maria had caused in Puerto Rico.⁹ Another factor that led to indirect deaths was the inaccessibility to medical aid. Hurricane survivor Maritza Stanchich recalled that people could not get to hospitals because of ravaged roads and highways.¹⁰ One elderly man, for instance, was unable to get his dialysis and at the time of the interview did not have the procedure in six days because he was stuck in his house. People with life-threatening diseases were also extremely at risk. Most of their medications needed to be refrigerated to remain stable, but this was not possible due to the island wide power outages. Besides, failing back-up generators made it difficult for hospitals to operate at this crucial time and many pharmacies and shops had to close amid the crisis.¹¹

Irma and Maria were two of three major storms of the 2017 hurricane season. The other was Hurricane Harvey that ravaged Texas in August 2017 and which caused more than 150 cm of rainfall and at least 68 direct deaths.¹² After Irma passed Puerto Rico, it continued its course and mostly affected Florida where 6 million residents had to be evacuated.¹³ Together with the 2017 California wildfires, Harvey, Irma and Maria affected more than 47 million Americans.¹⁴ Consequently, more disaster survivors registered for federal assistance than in the previous ten years combined.¹⁵ Altogether, the three hurricanes caused \$265 billion in damage and were all among the top five costliest hurricanes in United States history.¹⁶ Maria is undoubtedly the most destructive hurricane to hit Puerto Rico in modern times with an estimated \$90 billion in

⁷ Ibid, 34-35.

⁸ Ibid, 35.

⁹ The George Washington University, "Ascertainment of the Estimated Excess Mortality from Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico," *Milken Institute School of Public Health* (2018), 9.

¹⁰ Erin Brodwin, "Puerto Ricans Describe Utter Devastation a Week after Hurricane Maria: 'We're Breathing,'" *Business Insider*, September 27, 2017. <https://www.businessinsider.nl/puerto-rico-people-conditions-days-no-power-water-hurricane-maria-2017-9?international=true&r=US> (Accessed April 16, 2020).

¹¹ Robin Respaut and Dave Graham, "Battered Puerto Rico Hospitals on Life Support after Hurricane Maria," *Reuters*, September 25, 2017. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-storm-maria-puertorico-hospitals/battered-puerto-rico-hospitals-on-life-support-after-hurricane-maria-idUSKCN1BZ13S> (Accessed March 21, 2020).

¹² Eric S. Blake and David A. Zelinsky, "Hurricane Harvey," *National Hurricane Center* (2018): 1.

¹³ John P. Cangialosi et al, "Hurricane Irma," 13.

FEMA, *2017 Hurricane Season*, 1.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

damage.¹⁷ This also makes it the third costliest hurricane after Katrina (2005; \$161 billion) and Harvey (2017; \$125 billion).¹⁸ Its impact is reinforced by Puerto Rico's socioeconomic and political situation.

Hurricane Maria turned from a natural disaster into a humanitarian crisis. This is because, as historian Stuart Schwartz emphasizes, "the vulnerability of specific social and economic structures and because of political decisions and a variety of human actions before and after their impact."¹⁹ As such, disasters are socially produced and can reveal the underlying fabric of political and social life. Puerto Rico is a prime example. As an unincorporated territory of the United States, the island has been subordinated to United States colonialism and imperialism, with severe consequences for the sociopolitical and economic life. The United States has a long colonial and imperial history. It first colonized the territories that later became the different states of the United States of America. Later, it expanded externally and acquired overseas possessions such as Puerto Rico, the United States Virgin Islands and the Philippines. Over time, however, the United States shifted from colonialism to imperialism while the motives for expansion remained rather similar. Both forms of government are typically driven by economic, geopolitical, diplomatic, or ideological considerations.²⁰ The difference lies in the amount of direct control that the dominant power holds and how much sovereignty local subjects retain.

Colonialism is characterized by the annexation and occupation of territory, the subsequent direct rule over regions and populations and the seizure of sovereignty whereby a colonial state apparatus is formed.²¹ Imperialism, in contrast, is non-territorial. It involves the authoritative political ordering of space with the purpose of advancing one's own national interests in the anarchy of the international system.²² It is the extension of a nation's power and influence beyond formal political borders, which through asymmetries in political leverage enables and produces relations of hierarchy, exploitation, discipline, and dispossession.²³ Contrary to colonialists, imperialists typically operate on the background of dominated political

¹⁷ Richard J. Pasch et al, "Hurricane Maria," 4. Previously, Hurricane Georges (1998) was the most costly with \$5 billion in damage.

¹⁸ Richard J. Pasch et al, "Hurricane Maria," 7 and FEMA, *2017 Hurricane Season*, 1.

¹⁹ Stuart B. Schwartz, "The Hurricane of San Ciriaco: Disaster, Politics, and Society in Puerto Rico, 1899-1901," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 72, no. 3 (1992): 303.

²⁰ George Steinmetz, "Return to Empire: the New US Imperialism in Comparative Historical Perspective," *Sociological Theory* 23, no. 4 (2005): 349.

²¹ *Ibid*, 344.

²² *Ibid*, 342, 350.

²³ Steinmetz, "Return to Empire," 344 and Paul A. Kramer, "Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States in the World," *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 5 (2011): 1349.

spaces, respect autonomy and hardly interfere with local politics unless their economic and political interests are endangered.²⁴

Contemporarily, the position of the United States among other imperialist countries is hegemonic.²⁵ It uses various mechanisms to exert its influence globally and to impose in the dominated spaces policies that are favorable to its own interests.²⁶ The methods it employs are, among other things, the establishment of United States military installations in more than 140 countries, training of foreign police and military forces, bending international organizations – such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank – to their will, making large direct investments abroad, freezing foreign assets and granting or withholding diplomatic recognition.²⁷ These mechanisms were particularly used since 1945 to ensure the free movement of capital, commodities and people and to stabilize political conditions within America's global spheres of influence.²⁸ Since that time it has also abstained from colonialism and gradually moved to imperialism in a way to compete more successfully with the Soviet Union for Third World solidarities.²⁹

The United States engaged both in colonialism and imperialism in Puerto Rico, which was driven by geopolitical, economic and ideological motives. Territorial defense, capitalist expansion and the Manifest Destiny ideology propelled the mainland to annex the island. Starting in 1898, Puerto Rico had been subject to colonialism whereby the local government was dissolved and the colonial government was subordinated to American policies to secure United States hegemony over island affairs. Power over executive policy, for instance, was assured through the presidential appointment of Americans to political posts in Puerto Rico. Besides, Puerto Ricans were initially stripped of many basic rights, such as the right of free speech and freedom of the press. This changed over time, for example with the granting of United States citizenship in 1917. Colonialism eventually turned into a more imperialistic form of domination. In the 1940s, for example, Puerto Ricans were no longer excluded from political posts that regulated day-to-day policies. United States direct involvement in island affairs

²⁴ Steinmetz, "Return to Empire," 349.

²⁵ Gérard Duménil and Dominique Lévy, "The Economics of US Imperialism at the Turn of the 21st Century," *Review of International Political Economy* 11, no. 4 (2004): 660.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 659.

²⁷ Steinmetz, "Return to Empire," 351 and Thomas G. Weiss and Sam Daws, *The Oxford Handbook on the United Nations*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 244. The United States can influence decisions of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank because its voting power in both organizations is more than twice that of other member countries, it is the only member with an effective veto power and it is the largest single vote holder in both organizations.

²⁸ Steinmetz, "Return to Empire," 350.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 354.

especially diminished after 1952 when Puerto Rico gained limited self-government and became a Commonwealth. The United States does still interfere, however, when economic and political developments on the island adversely affect the federal government. Washington and San Juan nevertheless ascertained that the colonial relationship had ended when the island became a Commonwealth.³⁰ With the Cold War in mind, the United States acclaimed Puerto Rico's new political status as a response to those who attacked the country for its colonial and imperialist policies. In 1953, the United Nations accepted that the Commonwealth constituted self-determination and removed Puerto Rico from its list of non-self-governing territories.

It is important to note, however, that imperialism is not the only feature of Puerto Rican political life and that one cannot ascribe its current deplorable political and economic situation entirely to the federal government. There have been instances of local mismanagement and corruption. Three years after Hurricane Maria, for instance, the inefficacy of Puerto Rico's Office of Emergency Management was revealed when a warehouse full of unused supplies for Maria's relief effort were found in the city of Ponce.³¹ There are also instances whereby both the federal and insular governments can be blamed for the situation of the island. In May 2017, a few months before Hurricane Maria made landfall, the insular government filed for a form of bankruptcy in federal court.³² Its debt is partly due to United States policies and partly because the Puerto Rican government has continued to borrow excessively to pay operating expenses. Previously, mainland corporations who relocated to Puerto Rico enjoyed tax breaks whereby they were exempted from paying federal corporate taxes.³³ Due to lost tax revenues and politicians' opinion that it was an illegitimate corporate tax giveaway, Congress phased it out over a ten-year period starting in 1996. When it ended, many corporations sought other tax havens and relocated to the Cayman Islands.³⁴ The consequent loss of more than 100,000 direct and indirect jobs accelerated out-migration from Puerto Ricans to the mainland. A Pew Research Center study reveals that between 2005 and 2015 about 446,000 Puerto Ricans had

³⁰ Lisa G. Materson, "Ruth Reynolds, Solidarity Activism, and the Struggle against U.S. Colonialism in Puerto Rico," *Modern American History* 2, no. 2 (2019): 185.

³¹ Associated Press, "Puerto Rico Residents Outraged after Discovering Warehouse Full of Unused Aid from Hurricane Maria," *NBC News*, January 19, 2020. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/puerto-rico-residents-outraged-after-discovering-warehouse-full-unused-aid-n1118501> (Accessed February 27, 2020).

³² Mary Williams Walsh, "Puerto Rico Declares a Form of Bankruptcy," *New York Times*, May 3, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/03/business/dealbook/puerto-rico-debt.html?mcubz=0&_r=0 (Accessed February 2, 2020).

³³ James L. Dietz, *Economic History of Puerto Rico: Institutional Change and Capitalist Development*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 209.

³⁴ Dara Lind, "Puerto Rico's Debt Crisis, Explained in 11 Basic Facts." *Vox*, August 3, 2015. <https://www.vox.com/2015/7/10/8924517/puerto-rico-bankrupt-debt> (Accessed February 27, 2020).

left for continental United States and the Puerto Rican diaspora on the mainland currently even outnumber the population on the island.³⁵

Migration accelerated after Hurricane Maria, whereby in 2018 some 133,500 Puerto Ricans moved to the United States. This has been an increase in migration rates of 36,9% compared to 2017.³⁶ Yet the exodus cannot entirely be attributed to the disaster. Shockingly high poverty rates, the ongoing economic hardships and consequent migrations lead to a ‘death spiral’ on the island.³⁷ Sustained high unemployment levels instigate further migration, which in turn reduces the tax base and the labor force.³⁸ This, in combination with human capital flight and the migration of young adults, impoverishes the island’s recovery prospects.

Various scholars from different domains have researched the impact of Hurricane Maria on Puerto Rico.³⁹ The Center for Puerto Rican Studies, for instance, published a report on the impact of Maria on the housing crisis on the island.⁴⁰ In agriculture, studies focused on the severity of damage to vegetation and to different land types;⁴¹ on alterations in hydrological patterns;⁴² on tree damage and mortality;⁴³ and on changes in bird populations as a result of the hurricane.⁴⁴ Experts also linked the disaster with anthropogenic activities and stated that human behavior intensified the flooding after Maria.⁴⁵ Moreover, research looked at the use of social

³⁵ Jens Manuel Krogstad, Kelsey Jo Starr and Aleksandra Sandstrom, “Key Findings about Puerto Rico,” *Pew Research Center*, March 29, 2017. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/03/29/key-findings-about-puerto-rico/> (Accessed February 27, 2020), and “Puerto Ricans Continue to Grow in 2016,” *Center for Puerto Rican Studies* (2017): 1. In 2016, 5.4 million Puerto Ricans lived on continental United States while 3.2 million resided on the island.

³⁶ Brian Glassman, “A Third of Movers From Puerto Rico to the Mainland United States Relocated to Florida in 2018,” *United States Census Bureau*, September 26, 2019. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2019/09/puerto-rico-outmigration-increases-poverty-declines.html> (Accessed February 20, 2020).

³⁷ Dara Lind, “Puerto Rico’s Debt Crisis,” and Glassman, “A Third of Movers.” According to the United States Census Bureau, the 2018 poverty rate was 43,1%. In comparison, the rate in Mississippi - which is the state with the highest poverty rate on the mainland - was 19,7% while the national rate was 13,1%.

³⁸ Gabriel Stargardter and Dave Graham, “Trump Lays Blame on Puerto Ricans for Slow Hurricane Response,” *Reuters*, September 30, 2017. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-puertorico-trump-idUSKCN1C50GQ> (Accessed February 23, 2020).

³⁹ The Institute of Statistics of Puerto Rico (el Instituto de Estadísticas de Puerto Rico) developed a platform where one can consult studies about the impact of Maria before, during, and after it hit the island. The data can be found on <https://estadisticas.pr/en/datos-del-huracan-maria>

⁴⁰ Jennifer Hinojosa and Edwin Meléndez, “The Housing Crisis in Puerto Rico and the Impact of Hurricane Maria,” *Center for Puerto Rican Studies* (2018): 2.

⁴¹ Tangao Hu and Ronald B. Smith, “The Impact of Hurricane Maria on the Vegetation of Dominica and Puerto Rico using Multispectral Remote Sensing,” *Remote Sensing* 10 (2018): 4.

⁴² P.W. Miller et al, “Persistent Hydrological Consequences of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico,” *Geophysical Research Letters* 46 (2019): 1421.

⁴³ Yanlei Feng et al, “Rapid Remote Sensing Assessment of Impacts from Hurricane Maria on Forests of Puerto Rico,” *PeerJ Preprints* 6 (2018): 11.

⁴⁴ John D. Lloyd, Christopher C. Rimmer and José A. Salguero-Farías, “Short-Term Effects of Hurricanes Maria and Irma on Forest Birds of Puerto Rico,” *PLoS ONE* 14, no. 6 (2019): 7.

⁴⁵ Emily Shuckburgh, Dann Mitchell and Peter Stott, “Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria: how Natural were these ‘Natural Disasters’?” *Weather* 72, no. 11 (2017): 353.

media in the aftermath of Maria. Facebook was used to analyze migration patterns, including return migration, and an analysis of Twitter messages highlighted how Puerto Ricans responded to news about the official death toll.⁴⁶ Maria also affected mental health. One investigation revealed that two-thirds of study participants showed symptoms of either major depression, generalized anxiety disorder or posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) due to the storm.⁴⁷

Scholars furthermore incorporated historical, economic and sociopolitical factors of the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico in their analyses of the hurricane. Benach et al, for example, argue that Irma and Maria provided the opportunity to examine the underlying sociopolitical and historical aspects that have led to Puerto Rico's alarming situation.⁴⁸ They fail, however, to adequately connect their historical explanation to the impact of the hurricanes. Community health scientist Rodríguez-Díaz expands on this perspective by connecting colonialism to Hurricane Maria.⁴⁹ He focuses on federal actions that inhibit the effectiveness of relief aid – such as austerity measures on Puerto Rico's government budget – to indicate how the hurricane exposed the island's colonial status.

The current study builds on Rodríguez-Díaz' point. It will likewise examine United States imperialist policies with regards to Puerto Rico. It expands the analysis, however, by also demonstrating how these policies have been revealed through the federal relief aid in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. The purpose is not to show that imperialism shaped insular realities. Rather, the aim is to reveal how imperialism became visible through the relief aid. Therefore, the central question is:

To what extent was United States relief aid to Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria shaped by imperialism?

To answer this question, the study uses perspectives from the disciplines of history and International Relations. It is necessary to first review the history of the United States – Puerto

⁴⁶ Monica Alexander, Kivan Polimis and Emilio Zaghenni, "The Impact of Hurricane Maria on Out-Migration from Puerto Rico: Evidence from Facebook Data," *SocArxiv* (2019): 4 and Grisel M. García-Ramírez et al, "#4645Boricuas: Twitter Reactions to the Estimates of Deaths by Hurricane María in Puerto Rico," *Journal of Community Psychology* (2019): 3.

⁴⁷ Isabella M. Ferré et al, "Hurricane Maria's Impact on Punta Santiago, Puerto Rico: Community Needs and Mental Health Assessment Six Months Postimpact," *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness* 13, no. 1 (2018): 5.

⁴⁸ Joan Benach et al, "What the Puerto Rican Hurricanes Make Visible: Chronicle of a Public Health Disaster Foretold," *Social Science & Medicine* 238 (2019): 2.

⁴⁹ Carlos E. Rodríguez-Díaz, "Maria in Puerto Rico: Natural Disaster in a Colonial Archipelago," *American Journal of Public Health* 108, no. 1 (2018): 30.

Rico relationship, because it explains the current impoverished situation of the island and the role the hegemon has played in it. Focusing on the narrative of United States involvement in Puerto Rico will furthermore clarify that the federal response to Maria is partly and perhaps implicitly led by conceptions about Puerto Ricans that have been in place since the 19th century, such as their supposed inferiority vis-à-vis Americans. To make the case study, a content analysis of various publicly available online sources will be conducted. Articles from United States and Puerto Rican news outlets and research institutions will be analyzed. These include, for instance, *Politico*, *el Nuevo Día*, *Reuters* and the *Washington Post*. Government documents will furthermore be examined and Twitter messages by President Donald Trump will also be an important source for the case study.

The current analysis contributes to studies of United States imperialism and studies about the United States – Puerto Rico relationship. This is relevant not only for American and Puerto Rican historians but also for scholars of other societies because United States imperialism has been significant for the development of many, and by the late 20th century, feasibly all other nations due to its hegemony in the international system.⁵⁰ The study furthermore underscores that imperial relationships are not static and that they are constantly formulated and reformulated. Analyzing the response of the federal government has credibility because its reaction, or lack thereof, regenerates the imperial relationship. It is not unlikely that imperialism in Puerto Rico has become implicit after the island gained limited self-determination in 1952. This is suggested by the fact that a 2017 poll revealed that millions of Americans were unaware of the relationship between the metropole and Puerto Rico, for instance because only 54 percent of Americans knew that Puerto Ricans are United States citizens and that Hurricane Maria was a domestic instead of a foreign disaster.⁵¹ Yet the undemocratic, imperialist policies that have impeded relief aid and have limited the insular government's emergency operations – such as withholding much needed financial assistance – reveal that imperialism is still in force in Puerto Rico. In this study, Hurricane Maria is used as a lens to shed light on broader tensions between the United States and Puerto Rico. The hurricane evidences that there is a crisis that is rooted in something deeper than the hurricane and that there is continuity in the processes of imperialism toward the island.

⁵⁰ Kramer, "Power and Connection," 1349.

⁵¹ Materson, "Ruth Reynolds," 183 and Kyle Drop and Brendan Nyhan, "Nearly Half of Americans Don't Know Puerto Ricans are Fellow Citizens," *New York Times*, September 26, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/26/upshot/nearly-half-of-americans-dont-know-people-in-puerto-ricoans-are-fellow-citizens.html> (Accessed April 12, 2020).

The following chapters will substantiate that United States imperialism affected the relief aid effort after Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico in 2017. Chapter two first specifies the history of the diplomatic relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico. The story starts in the 15th century with the Spanish conquest and its rationale for annexation of Puerto Rico. Next, it elaborates on the decay of the Spanish empire, the reasons for United States involvement in the Spanish-Cuban-American War and why it subsequently annexed Puerto even though the island initially was not a top priority. The language of the Treaty of Paris, which established peace, signals the birth of United States imperial policies toward the island. It continues with an analysis of the policies that the hegemon shaped based on the belief that Puerto Ricans were not ready for self-determination and that it needed to be trained in the principles of democracy. In studying the policies, a division is made between political, economic and cultural imperialism although all domains affect each other. Laws such as the 1900 Foraker Act and the 1917 Jones Act, for example, politically subordinated Puerto Rico to the will of the United States whilst it simultaneously stimulated economic imperialism.

Chapter three explains the case study. It examines the federal response to Hurricane Maria and uses three topics to exemplify how the aid was guided by United States imperialism. The analysis concentrates on the preferential treatment of states over Puerto Rico in assistance efforts, the restraints on monetary support, and the behavior and language use of President Trump. The governmental response after Maria has been substantially different compared to Harvey and Irma, which is largely due to differences in political leverage. Besides, financial support was blocked or constrained through bureaucratic hurdles because of a lack of trust in Puerto Rican politicians. Verbal and nonverbal communication furthermore signaled that the humanitarian disaster in Puerto Rico did not need to be prioritized. In the conclusion in chapter four, these factors will indicate that United States imperialism inhibited effective recovery, negatively impacted the Puerto Rican population and kept the federal government in control over island affairs.

2. The United States and Puerto Rico: An Unequal Relationship

In this chapter, the history of the diplomatic relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico is explained. This is done through an analysis of the Spanish Conquest and subsequent colonization of Puerto Rico, the turning point of 1898 when the United States took possession of the island, and the imperialist policies that it implemented before and after Puerto Rico became a Commonwealth. The policies are explained through the political, economic and cultural domains. It is necessary to unfold this history because the United States response after Hurricane Maria shows that the relief aid is merely a new way in which imperialism is playing out on the island.

2.1. Spanish Conquest

Puerto Rico can be dubbed the oldest colony in the world. From 1898 to the present, it has been a territory of the United States, but before that, it was subjected to the Spanish empire.⁵² On November 19, 1493, Christopher Columbus landed in Puerto Rico during his second voyage. Yet it took until 1508 – when Ponce de León founded the first permanent Spanish settlement on the island – that a process of political and economic dependency started which still exists to this day.⁵³ In the 16th and 17th century, the Dutch and British empires tried to take over the island. The former seized the port of San Juan in 1625, but was forced to withdraw soon after and the latter succeeded in bringing San Juan under British rule for 65 days.⁵⁴ The Spaniards, however, retook the island and controlled it until it was ceded to the United States in 1898 – together with Cuba, Guam and the Philippines – after the Spanish-Cuban-American War.

Initially, Puerto Rico was not a top priority for Spain or the United States. Spain's early interest in the island was spurred by the lust for gold and the hope of easy wealth. After the small amounts of gold were depleted, however, many colonizers left for other colonies such as Peru and Mexico.⁵⁵ Thereafter, Spain's interest in the island became primarily geostrategic. According to historian James L. Dietz, Puerto Rico turned into "a strategic location for protecting ships en route to and from Mexico and Central and South America and for guarding the entrance of the Caribbean Sea from incursions by filibusters, privateers, and European-

⁵² Robert B. Edgerton, *Remember the Maine, to Hell with Spain: America's 1898 Adventure in Imperialism*, (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004), 133.

⁵³ José Trías Monge, *Puerto Rico: The Trials of the Oldest Colony in the World*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 5.

⁵⁴ Edgerton, *Remember the Maine*, 136, and Trías Monge, *Puerto Rico*, vii.

⁵⁵ Trías Monge, *Puerto Rico*, 6.

financed invaders.”⁵⁶ By dominating the sea lanes to the New World, Spain had an important commercial and military advantage over other European powers. The island nevertheless remained politically underdeveloped until the end of the 18th century.⁵⁷ This neglect ended when many Spanish possessions in the Americas successfully fought for independence, which eventually left Spain only with Puerto Rico and Cuba.

A powerful 19th century independence movement in Cuba further weakened the Spanish empire and sparked United States involvement into the conflict. At first, the United States supported Spain under the Monroe Doctrine, whereby it condemned any attempt by European governments to extend their power in the Americas. At the same time, the United States would not interfere in the internal affairs of European colonies, such as Puerto Rico and Cuba.⁵⁸ This changed, however, when Cuba’s independence movement endangered United States geostrategic and economic interests in Latin America and the Caribbean.⁵⁹ Americans feared that Spain would cede the island to France or Great Britain, were concerned about American investments on the island, and worried about the possible suspension of sugar imports.⁶⁰ This is understandable, because Cuba was the largest sugar producer in the world with the United States as its most important customer and the major investor in its economy.⁶¹ Therefore, and stirred after the sinking of the U.S.S. Maine, United States interventionists urged president McKinley to declare war on Spain.⁶² At the time, Cuban freedom fighters were already winning a 30-year independence war against Spain. The United States joined the last three months of the war whereby it snatched victory from the Cubans at their moment of success.⁶³

2.2. United States Annexation of Puerto Rico

Although Puerto Rico was not a top priority for the United States prior to the war in Cuba, it gradually became a legitimate target because of its geopolitical, economic and ideological importance. United States expansionism toward Puerto Rico was driven by concerns about territorial defense, a desire to capture and control Puerto Rican markets for North American

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ José Luis Méndez, “Las Ciencias Sociales y la Política en Puerto Rico,” *Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 17 (2007): 44.

⁵⁸ Terence Cannon, *Revolutionary Cuba*, (Havana: José Martí Publishing House, 1983), 20.

⁵⁹ Dietz, *Economic History*, 79.

⁶⁰ Edgerton, *Remember the Maine*, 39, and Dietz, *Economic History*, 79.

⁶¹ Edgerton, *Remember the Maine*, 39.

⁶² Dietz, *Economic History*, 80.

⁶³ Cannon, *Revolutionary Cuba*, 35.

products, and the Manifest Destiny ideology.⁶⁴ Geopolitically, the island could serve as a powerful naval station in the Caribbean from which sea lanes and the proposed Panama Canal would be protected and from which sea power would be secured.⁶⁵ Naval power was furthermore significant for the American economy because it protected the merchant fleet that carried American products overseas.⁶⁶ Additionally, Puerto Rico was important for the United States economy as it provided new markets for the surplus of American goods. United States expansionism was also driven by the Manifest Destiny ideology. Rooted in theories of racial superiority, the ideology assumed that the United States was destined by God to civilize people who were supposedly lacking a history and culture of their own.⁶⁷ Americans regarded Puerto Ricans as an inferior Other who needed to be civilized and with that rhetoric, they legitimized their expansion toward the island.⁶⁸

Guided by geopolitical, economic and ideological interests, the United States militarily intervened in Puerto Rico when the war in Cuba came to an end. On July 25, 1898, American troops landed in southern Puerto Rico where the population was least loyal to the Spanish crown.⁶⁹ Soon after, Spanish forces surrendered after battles in which they suffered losses ten times greater than the Americans.⁷⁰ The Treaty of Paris established peace on December 10, 1898 and transferred sovereignty over Puerto Rico, Cuba, Guam and the Philippines to the United States. It also established the relationship of domination and subordination between the United States and Puerto Rico and it was the birth of United States imperial policies toward the island. The annexation in itself underscored American superiority. Spain and the United States decided the fate of Puerto Rico and its inhabitants without consulting them or seeking their consent.⁷¹ Article IX of the treaty in particular established American supremacy, stating that “The civil rights and political status of the native inhabitants of the territories hereby ceded to the United States shall be determined by Congress.”⁷² As historian Trías Monge argues, the Treaty of Paris was unique compared to treaties that were ratified after the Louisiana Purchase, the cession of Florida, the purchase of Alaska, the annexation of Hawaii and the treaty with

⁶⁴ Trías Monge, *Puerto Rico*, 27, and Méndez, “Las Ciencias Sociales,” 46.

⁶⁵ Dietz, *Economic History*, 83.

⁶⁶ Edgerton, *Remember the Maine*, 7.

⁶⁷ Méndez, “Las Ciencias Sociales,” 45.

⁶⁸ Helen Safa, “Changing Forms of US Hegemony in Puerto Rico: the Impact on the Family and Sexuality,” *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development* 32, no.1 (2003): 12 and Camilo Quintero Toro, “¿En qué Anda la Historia de la Ciencia y el Imperialismo? Saberes Locales, Dinámicas Coloniales y el Papel de los Estados Unidos en la Ciencia en el Siglo XX,” *Historia Crítica* 31 (2006): 164.

⁶⁹ Edgerton, *Remember the Maine*, 84.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁷¹ Trías Monge, *Puerto Rico*, 30, and Dietz, *Economic History*, 82.

⁷² Edgerton, *Remember the Maine*, 140, and Trías Monge, *Puerto Rico*, 27.

which the United States acquired a large part of Mexico.⁷³ These treaties were comparable in that they granted the inhabitants of the newly acquired territories full citizenship rights when the regions would be incorporated into the Union. The Treaty of Paris, however, did not use the same language for Puerto Rico.

Still, Americans were welcomed on the island because many believed that they would bring solutions to the economic, political, and social injustices that Puerto Ricans had experienced under Spanish rule.⁷⁴ Association with Washington was regarded as a democratic alternative to the backwardness and oppressiveness of Madrid.⁷⁵ As such, Puerto Ricans received Americans warmly.⁷⁶ The same did not hold for Americans' views of Puerto Ricans who, due to racial prejudice, were not too fond of the largely black population of the island.⁷⁷ Americans used white patriarchal normativity to depict Puerto Rico as a backward society inhabited by black, deviant, non-normative colonial subjects where American institutions allegedly could not thrive.⁷⁸ The comparative interpretation between Americans and Puerto Ricans helped to define and secure white supremacy in the United States. Regardless of this view General Nelson A. Miles – who led the Puerto Rican campaign during the War – proclaimed after the invasion that,

The chief object of the American military forces will be to overthrow the armed authority of Spain and to give to the people of your beautiful island the largest measure of liberty consistent with this military occupation. We have not come to make war upon the people of a country that for centuries has been oppressed, but on the contrary, to bring you protection, not only to yourselves but to your property, to promote your prosperity and bestow upon you the immunities and blessings of the liberal institutions of our Government. This is not a war of devastation, but one to give to all within the control of its military and naval forces the advantages and blessings of enlightened civilization.⁷⁹

⁷³ Trías Monge, *Puerto Rico*, 27.

⁷⁴ Edgerton, *Remember the Maine*, 140, and Trías Monge, *Puerto Rico*, 30.

⁷⁵ Dietz, *Economic History*, 83. Laborers, for instance, believed that United States labor laws would be extended to the island, which would protect them from corruption by their employers and which would bring them greater rights.

⁷⁶ Edgerton, *Remember the Maine*, 84.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 86.

⁷⁸ Carlos Alamo-Pastrana, *Seams of Empire: Race and Radicalism in Puerto Rico and the United States*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2016), 6.

⁷⁹ Trías Monge, *Puerto Rico*, 30.

The statement contradicted reality. In fact, the United States annexed Puerto Rico for imperial purposes and not to free the population from Spanish rule.⁸⁰ The Treaty of Paris, for instance, did not mention any United States responsibility for the civil rights, welfare, or freedom of Puerto Ricans.⁸¹ It would soon become clear that the United States indeed did not highly value the fate of the Puerto Rican people and that it acted out of self-interest.

2.3. United States Imperialism in Puerto Rico

United States imperialism in Puerto Rico was expressed in several ways. Laws, such as the 1900 Foraker Act and the 1917 Jones Act officially subordinated Puerto Rico to the will of the United States. These laws also stimulated economic imperialism which still negatively impacts Puerto Rico's economic development today. Cultural imperialism, expressed through an Americanization campaign, furthermore needed to assimilate the Puerto Rican population to United States norms, values and traditions. The United States shaped its imperial policies toward the island based on the belief that Puerto Ricans were not ready for self-government nor territorial government.⁸² Until they were deemed fit, the United States would lead a learning period of unspecified duration to train the population in the principles of democracy. A necessary part of this learning process would be political and cultural assimilation, or Americanization, whereby United States laws and institutions were extended to the island and by which English would become the language of public life. There was no actual promise, however, that Americanization would eventually lead to independence, statehood or any other form of self-government. This enabled the United States to maintain Puerto Rico as a dependency.

2.3.1. Political Imperialism

After the end of the Spanish-Cuban-American War, the United States began its imperial policies by installing a military government in Puerto Rico. At first, the government was advised to keep the local laws and institutions intact as much as possible, but solely when they were compatible with United States policies. Yet the military government soon altered nearly all structures of public life.⁸³ General John R. Brooke – the first military governor who served from October 18

⁸⁰ Edgerton, *Remember the Maine*, 140.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Trías Monge, *Puerto Rico*, 38.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 31.

to December 6, 1898 – suppressed the Spanish Provincial Council because he deemed it unnecessary and incompatible with the administration of public affairs.⁸⁴ His successor, General Guy V. Henry, went even further. During his term from December 6, 1898 to May 8, 1899, he saw it as his duty to assimilate the island’s legal and political system to that of the United States. For that reason, he removed various Puerto Ricans from ministries, dissolved the Council of Ministers, fired mayors and councilmen, and suspended the civil authority.⁸⁵ He furthermore dissolved the last remaining institution of local government, the Insular Council, on February 6, 1899 because it was not compatible with American methods.⁸⁶ He stated that “it was contrary to that which should exist under the present form of government, in which there can be only one head, the Military Governor of the island.”⁸⁷ Puerto Rican politicians who objected the introduction of American business methods were fired after which Henry appointed Americans to fill in these political posts.

It is striking how Henry went against the statement of General Nelson A. Miles. As mentioned above, the latter proclaimed that the military occupation would give Puerto Ricans “the largest measure of liberty” and bestow upon them “the immunities and blessings of the liberal institutions” of the United States government.⁸⁸ In April 1899, Henry nevertheless suppressed the right of free speech, suspended one major newspaper and subjected another to criminal proceedings, placed all journals under the direct supervision of the military government, and announced that it would “not allow the publication of writings in which reference is made to the Army of the United States or to the Military Government, lest the extreme case of such publicity can be justified with conclusive proof.”⁸⁹ In May 1899, Henry requested to be relieved from his governorship. Thereafter, General George W. Davis succeeded him and remained until May 1900.⁹⁰ During his administration the transition from a military to a civil government was discussed. In Davis’ opinion, Puerto Rico was not ready for limited self-government nor territorial government and had to remain a dependency of the United States.⁹¹

⁸⁴ Pedro A. Cabán, *Constructing a Colonial People: Puerto Rico and the United States, 1898-1932*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), 49.

⁸⁵ Trías Monge, *Puerto Rico*, 32.

⁸⁶ Dietz, *Economic History*, 85.

⁸⁷ Cabán, *Constructing*, 52.

⁸⁸ Trías Monge, *Puerto Rico*, 30.

⁸⁹ Trías Monge, *Puerto Rico*, 30, and Cabán, *Constructing*, 53.

⁹⁰ Trías Monge, *Puerto Rico*, 30.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 37.

On May 1, 1900, Congress nevertheless passed the Foraker Act which established the civil government and replaced the military government.⁹² It did not lead to more autonomy for Puerto Rico, however. On the contrary, the government was structured in such a way that it was subordinated to American policies and through which the United States secured hegemony over island affairs.⁹³ The Governor of the island and the heads of the six newly established departments were all appointed by the president of the United States with the advice and consent of the Senate.⁹⁴ The president strategically appointed North Americans to these positions as they regulated the day-to-day policies that guided socioeconomic development of the island.⁹⁵ The president also directed the judiciary by appointing members of the Supreme Court of Puerto Rico.⁹⁶ The Foraker Act furthermore established a Legislative Assembly composing of an Executive Council and a House of Delegates.⁹⁷ Yet American politicians from the mainland could exercise veto power in the Council and Congress could annul any law that was approved by the Puerto Rican legislature.⁹⁸ Next to these measures, the fact that a Resident Commissioner was to represent Puerto Rico in Congress – without voting powers – highlights how the Foraker Act was designed to benefit the United States.⁹⁹

Although the Foraker Act extended nearly all United States statutes and laws to Puerto Rico and even though citizens were formally entitled to the protection of the United States, the Constitution did not follow the flag.¹⁰⁰ In fact, the local population was stripped of many of the rights it had fought for under Spanish rule. Spain extended multiple constitutions to the island but these were overturned when it lost its possessions on continental Latin America.¹⁰¹ The

⁹² Robert McGreevey, *Borderline Citizens: the United States, Puerto Rico, and the Politics of Colonial Migration*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 23.

⁹³ Michael González-Cruz, “The US Invasion of Puerto Rico: Occupation and Resistance to the Colonial State, 1898 to the Present,” *Latin American Perspectives* 25, no.5 (1998): 11.

⁹⁴ Foraker Act, Pub. L. 56-191, 31 Stat. 77 (1900): 81. The heads of the departments were the Secretary, the Attorney-General, the Treasurer, the Auditor, the Commissioner of the Interior, and the Commissioner of Education. All officials had to report on insular affairs to the president through the heads of departments on the mainland, such as through the Attorney-General of the United States. At the same time, the president had the authority to remove them from their posts.

⁹⁵ Dietz, *Economic History*, 87. Until 1946, all Governors of the island were North Americans.

⁹⁶ Foraker Act, Pub. L. 56-191, 31 Stat. 77 (1900): 84. He appointed the chief justice, associate justices and the marshal of the Supreme Court.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 82.

⁹⁸ Foraker Act, Pub. L. 56-191, 31 Stat. 77 (1900): 83, and Dietz, *Economic History*, 87. The Executive Council existed of eleven presidentially appointed members. Because only five had to be native Puerto Ricans, Americans could exercise veto power.

⁹⁹ Dietz, *Economic History*, 88.

¹⁰⁰ Foraker Act, Pub. L. 56-191, 31 Stat. 77 (1900): 79-80. The internal revenue laws were not extended to the island.

¹⁰¹ Trías Monge, *Puerto Rico*, 9, and Edgerton, *Remember the Maine*, 139. The constitutions gave Puerto Rico the status of a Spanish province with representation in the Cortes and it granted free Puerto Ricans full Spanish citizenship rights with universal male suffrage.

rationale was that Spain lost them not because of despotic government, but because they were given too much political freedom.¹⁰² When Spain was weakened by the fights over its colonies it nevertheless relaxed its control over Puerto Rico and Cuba and gave in to the moderate demands of Puerto Rican politicians to maintain their loyalty.¹⁰³ Consequently, through the 1897 Autonomy Charter, Spain had granted Puerto Ricans limited self-government with full representation in the Spanish Cortes and considerable rights to control trade, set tariffs and to enter into commercial treaties.¹⁰⁴ It allowed for an autonomous local parliament with the power to legislate on all general matters of national concern.¹⁰⁵ The Foraker Act nullified the Autonomy Charter. Puerto Ricans lost equality of citizenship with Spain; the right to universal male suffrage; full representation in the metropolitan legislature; a local parliament; the right to enter into commercial treaties and the right to impose its own tariffs.¹⁰⁶ Thus, although a civil government replaced the military regime, the population went from an expanding self-rule under Spain to a repressive centralization under the United States.¹⁰⁷ The Foraker Act was meant to be temporary, but it took until 1917 for it to be superseded by the Jones Act.¹⁰⁸

The 1917 Jones Act was significant because it granted Puerto Ricans immediate United States citizenship. This was partly motivated by the desire to discourage the independence movement of the island.¹⁰⁹ World War I also seemed to be a motivating force. While some scholars argue that citizenship was granted to enable the recruitment of extra troops for the United States Army, others claim that it was done so that Puerto Ricans could relieve labor shortage during the war.¹¹⁰ In fact, however, American politicians already contemplated citizenship as early as 1909 to combat social and political unrest, for instance caused by the independence movement, and to restore a positive image of United States democracy in Latin America.¹¹¹ Prominent Puerto Rican politicians like Luis Muñoz Rivera opposed citizenship because it would change little in the colonial relationship and it would thwart Puerto Rico's political development.¹¹² It is probable that World War I accelerated the passage of the Jones

¹⁰² Trías Monge, *Puerto Rico*, 10.

¹⁰³ Dietz, *Economic History*, 13, 69. By the early 1800s, Spain was weakened due to its fight against England and France for its colonies, but it wished to maintain the last parts of its empire.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 76.

¹⁰⁵ Trías Monge, *Puerto Rico*, 13.

¹⁰⁶ McGreevey, *Borderline Citizens*, 24, and Trías Monge, *Puerto Rico*, 43.

¹⁰⁷ McGreevey, *Borderline Citizens*, 23.

¹⁰⁸ Trías Monge, *Puerto Rico*, 44, and Edgerton, *Remember the Maine*, 142.

¹⁰⁹ Jones Act, Pub. L.64-368, 39 Stat. 951 (1917): 953, and Trías Monge, *Puerto Rico*, 69.

¹¹⁰ Safa, "Changing Forms," 11, and Dietz, *Economic History*, 132.

¹¹¹ Harry Franqui-Rivera, *Soldiers of the Nation: Military Service and Modern Puerto Rico, 1868-1952*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 66.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 68.

Act, for instance because of Puerto Rico's geostrategic location and its ability to block access to the Panama Canal for enemies.¹¹³ It was not passed to recruit extra troops. Due to racial prejudice, military planners preferred to exclude "dark races" such as African Americans and Puerto Ricans from at least the fighting troops of the military.¹¹⁴ Even when the United States declared war on Germany, the Secretary of War declined offers from people on the island who were willing to volunteer their service and who wanted to enlarge the Puerto Rican Regiment.¹¹⁵ The territories of Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico were furthermore not included in the original Selective Service Act of 1917 which authorized conscription of white American males between the ages of 18 and 30. The Puerto Rican legislature had to request Congress itself to extend the draft to the island. These points refute the alleged connection between the passage of the Jones Act and World War I.

The Jones Act was an important step in the direction of Puerto Rican political rights, although it was a distinctly limited one. The extension of American citizenship did not make the island part of the United States nor made Puerto Ricans first class citizens.¹¹⁶ In fact, the Jones Act left many provisions of the Foraker Act intact and the language of the document clearly expressed the subordination of Puerto Rico to the United States government.¹¹⁷ The Governor of the island, for instance, had to "perform such additional duties and functions as may in pursuance of law be delegated to him by the President."¹¹⁸ Puerto Ricans were still not appointed to important governmental positions until the 1940s, the scope of local legislation remained narrow and Congress could – and often did – legislate for Puerto Rico.¹¹⁹ The Jones Act thus assured that the federal government retained power over executive policy and reaffirmed that Puerto Rico remained subject to the sovereignty of the United States. In short, the Jones Act did little to change the relationship between the island and the mainland.

Discontent about the Jones Act grew almost immediately after its passage and various bills were drafted in the 1920s to repeal it.¹²⁰ Debates revolved around the question whether

¹¹³ Ibid, 70.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 69.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 71, 72.

¹¹⁶ Trías Monge, *Puerto Rico*, 50. In 1901 the United States Supreme Court already ruled in *Balzac v. People of Porto Rico* – one of the Insular Cases that dealt with the status of American territories – that Puerto Rico was an unincorporated territory and that as such, not all provisions of the Constitution applied to the island.

¹¹⁷ Jones Act, Pub. L.64-368, 39 Stat. 951 (1917): 955, 961, 965. The Governor of Puerto Rico, the heads of the departments and members of the Supreme Court and of the district courts remained appointed by the president with the consent and advice of the Senate. They were still required to report on insular affairs to the respective departments of the federal government and Congress retained the right to annul any law approved by the Puerto Rican Legislature.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 955.

¹¹⁹ Trías Monge, *Puerto Rico*, 75.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 80.

Puerto Rico needed to move toward statehood, independence, or the intermediate form of a Commonwealth. The bills were repeatedly introduced in Congress but were never passed or never converted into law. Frustration persisted in the 1930s, which even led to violence on the island and the death of at least seven Puerto Ricans and one American.¹²¹ The quest for self-determination revived following the 1942 Atlantic Charter, which proclaimed “the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live,” and demanded the “sovereign rights of self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them.”¹²² It reawakened the status debate and led to demands of reform by Puerto Rican political parties. The federal government, however, proved unwilling to fulfill its own intentions.

The United States eventually granted Puerto Rico limited self-government in 1952 when the island became a Commonwealth. Public Law 600 of 1950 established the right of the island to “organize a government pursuant to a constitution of their own adoption.”¹²³ Through an island-wide referendum, Puerto Rican voters would reject or accept the conditions of the Public Law. The plebiscite was held on June 4, 1951 and was approved by 76.5 percent of the vote.¹²⁴ As a result, the Puerto Rican Legislature was authorized to call a constitutional convention to draft a constitution, which needed to provide a republican form of government and a bill of rights.¹²⁵ This was again submitted to a referendum on March 3, 1952 and accepted by nearly 80 percent of the voters.¹²⁶ The United States remained in control over the process of establishing the Commonwealth, because the president would transmit the constitution to Congress for approval, but only after he found it to conform “with the applicable provisions of [Public Law 600] and of the Constitution of the United States.”¹²⁷ Illuminating the low-priority congressional legislators accorded to Puerto Ricans, Congress initially did not accept the constitution and eliminated Section Twenty of the Bill of Rights – regarding social security – and adjusted a section on compulsory education.¹²⁸ President Truman eventually approved the Puerto Rican Constitution on July 3, 1952.¹²⁹ The constitutional convention accepted the

¹²¹ Ibid, 93.

¹²² Ibid, 103.

¹²³ *To Provide for the Organization of a Constitutional Government by the People of Puerto Rico*, Public Law 600, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 64 (1950), 319.

¹²⁴ Trías Monge, *Puerto Rico*, 113-114.

¹²⁵ Public Law 600 (1950), 319.

¹²⁶ Trías Monge, *Puerto Rico*, 115.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 117. Section Twenty recognized the right to social protection as a result of unemployment, sickness, old age, or disability; the right to obtain work; the right to an adequate standard of living; and the rights of mothers and children to special care and assistance.

¹²⁹ *Approving the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico which was Adopted by the People of Puerto Rico on March 3, 1952*, Public Law 447, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 66 (1952), 327.

changes imposed by Congress and on July 25, 1952 – exactly 54 years after the United States invasion of the island – the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, or the *Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico*, was established.¹³⁰

The diplomatic relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico did not change, however, when the island became a Commonwealth. Reports from the Senate and the House both explicitly stated that the change in status “would not change Puerto Rico’s fundamental political, social, and economic relationship to the United States.”¹³¹ It likewise did not alter the discontent on the island. Between 1967 and 2017 there were five referenda about Puerto Rico’s political status, although the results were never decisive.¹³²

2.3.2. Economic Imperialism

The 1900 Foraker Act and the 1917 Jones Act enhanced Puerto Rico’s dependency on the United States because they impeded the island’s control over the process of independent economic and political development.¹³³ Puerto Rico could not determine tariffs nor negotiate commercial treaties with nations other than the United States. Although foreign vessels could moor in Puerto Rico, all trade between the mainland and the island had to be carried by United States shipping lines.¹³⁴ This had adverse effects for the island, because the United States merchant fleet was more expensive than that of other countries and Puerto Rico’s economy was almost solely dependent on the United States for its imports and exports.¹³⁵ Dependency was furthermore enhanced when the United States integrated Puerto Rico into its monetary system.¹³⁶ The island suffered the fluctuations of the American economy, typically with greater

¹³⁰ Trías Monge, *Puerto Rico*, 117-118.

¹³¹ United States Congress, Senate, *Providing for the Organization of a Constitutional Government by the People of Puerto Rico*, June 6 (Legislative day, March 29), 1950, 81st Cong., 2nd sess., 1950, S. Rep. 1779, 3, and United States Congress, House of Representatives, *Providing for the Organization of a Constitutional Government by the People of Puerto Rico*, June 19, 1950, 81st Cong., 2nd sess., 1950, H. Rep. 2275, 3.

¹³² Pablo de Llano, “Puerto Rico Vota por la Anexión a EE UU en una Consulta no Vinculante Lastrada por la Abstención,” *País*, June 12, 2017. https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/06/11/estados_unidos/1497205333_216772.html (Accessed March 20, 2020). The referenda were held in 1967, 1993, 1998, 2012 and 2017. In 2017, 97% of the voters favored statehood, but the turnout was only 22% of the 2.2 million Puerto Ricans eligible to vote. Many political parties abstained from the plebiscite.

¹³³ Dietz, *Economic History*, 96.

¹³⁴ Safa, “Changing Forms,” 11, and Dietz, *Economic History*, 89.

¹³⁵ Dietz, *Economic History*, 90, 159. By 1939, for instance, nearly 92 percent of imports were purchased from the United States and 98 percent of exports were sold to the mainland.

¹³⁶ Safa, “Changing Forms,” 11.

severity. The economic disruptions and uncertainty caused by World War II, for instance, discouraged United States investments in an already stagnating Puerto Rican economy.¹³⁷

Due to such events, the insular government realized particularly in the 1940s that the situation of economic dependency had to change. Through development programs such as Operation Bootstrap, the local government attempted to industrialize the agricultural economy. Since there were no local capitalists on the island who were willing or able to invest in the economy, the insular government turned to United States capital for investments. American capitalists had a surplus of financial capital, control over technology and advanced managerial expertise.¹³⁸ Therefore, the island had to become a profit haven for United States investment whereby firms were exempted from paying various taxes and fees.¹³⁹ Enticed by favorable investment policies, Americans invested millions of dollars in industries on the island. Consequently, control over the island's economy shifted from local to "foreign" hands and the need for United States funds came to shape insular policies. Although living conditions on the island improved slightly due to the investments, the needs of Puerto Ricans were neglected in the process.¹⁴⁰ Investors were not motivated to improve the wellbeing of the islanders, but to create an environment that was beneficial to United States business interest.¹⁴¹ Coming on the heels of the Foraker Act and the Jones Act, the development policies reinforced the subordinate position of Puerto Ricans because it increased dependency on United States capital and business interest that directed and dominated Puerto Rico's economy.¹⁴²

Even after Puerto Rico became a Commonwealth in 1952, the United States kept control over the island's economic policies. Currently this is most prominent through the 2016 "Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act" or PROMESA. It established a Fiscal Oversight Board "to achieve fiscal responsibility and access to the capital markets."¹⁴³ Without interference from the insular government, it is authorized to manage and approve

¹³⁷ Dietz, *Economic History*, 186. Per capita incomes for 1930 and 1940 were both \$122, which indicates that at that moment the economy was stagnant.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 217.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, 209. Individuals and corporations who earned an income in Puerto Rico were already exempted from federal income taxes through Article 14 of the Foraker Act and Article 9 of the Jones Act. In an effort to further stimulate American investments on the island, the Puerto Rican government passed the Industrial Incentives Act in 1947. This exempted qualifying firms from property, excise, municipal and insular income taxes and from license fees until 1959 and partial exemption until 1962.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 240.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, 93. Dietz stated that through improvements, "American business entrepreneurs and administrators could come to Puerto Rico to produce and sell goods without fearing disease and with the assurance of finding a reasonably healthy and minimally educated population to labor in the cane fields and the factories."

¹⁴² *Ibid*, 99, 218.

¹⁴³ *Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act*, Public Law 114-187, *U.S. Statutes at Large* 130 (2016), 553.

Puerto Rico's fiscal plans, budgets and debt restructuring projects and to assess compliance therewith.¹⁴⁴ The fiscal pressures and economic control under PROMESA have led to inadequate maintenance and limited investments in critical infrastructure on the island.¹⁴⁵ Combined with an overall decrease in emergency management spending between 2013 and 2017, the economic situation exacerbated the impact of Hurricane Maria.

2.3.3. Cultural Imperialism

Next to political and economic domination, the United States also exerted its hegemony over Puerto Rico through culture and science.¹⁴⁶ The United States believed it necessary to culturally assimilate Puerto Ricans to American principles and traditions in preparation of self-government. Therefore, it initiated an Americanization campaign to uproot the Puerto Rican culture. English replaced Spanish as the official language and American traditions, customs and celebrations were introduced through the educational system. This became the principle means of Americanization.¹⁴⁷ The system was based on an assumed racial and cultural superiority and followed the ideology of psychologist and educator Granville Stanley Hall, the first president of the American Psychological Association.¹⁴⁸ He believed that “pre-adolescent children were nonreasoning and should be treated as savages in need of charismatic authority.”¹⁴⁹ Through schools, ideas about American spirit and national identity could be instilled into the hearts and minds of Puerto Rican children.¹⁵⁰ They were, for instance, ordered by the Commissioner of Education to start the school day with singing The Star-Spangled Banner, saluting the American flag, and reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.¹⁵¹ The campaign also promoted admiration for American history, symbols and holidays like 4th of July and Thanksgiving.¹⁵² The educational effort was furthermore driven by economic motives, because improvements in education would

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 563. The Act states that “Neither the Governor nor the Legislature may exercise any control, supervision, oversight, or review over the Oversight Board or its activities; or enact, implement, or enforce any statute, resolution, policy, or rule that would impair or defeat the purposes of this Act, as determined by the Oversight Board.”

¹⁴⁵ FEMA, *2017 Hurricane Season*, 11, and Carlos E. Rodríguez-Díaz, “Maria in Puerto Rico,” 30.

¹⁴⁶ Quintero Toro, “¿En qué Anda,” 154.

¹⁴⁷ Méndez, “Las Ciencias Sociales,” 44, and Trías Monge, *Puerto Rico*, 57, and Safa, “Changing Forms,” 12.

¹⁴⁸ Safa, “Changing Forms,” 12, and Antonio Sotomayor, “Caribbean Soccer: *Hispanoamericanismo* and the Identity Politics of *Fútbol* in Puerto Rico, 1898–1920s,” *The Latin Americanist* 61, no.2 (2017): 199.

¹⁴⁹ Sotomayor, “Caribbean Soccer,” 199.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 197, 201.

¹⁵¹ Trías Monge, *Puerto Rico*, 55, and Sotomayor, “Caribbean Soccer,” 207. Between 1898 and 1952, this was also the official flag of Puerto Rico.

¹⁵² Safa, “Changing Forms,” 22.

support American business interests on the island.¹⁵³ Physical education was particularly used for the Americanization campaign as it was, according to Hall, “one of the surest and most effective ways to secure order, system and co-operation of a disorderly, indifferent, and lawless class.”¹⁵⁴ American sports were introduced as a central part of the American way of life, because they supposedly reflected progress, liberalism and democracy.¹⁵⁵ Due to the values attached to education and sports, these domains became the instruments to extend American hegemony.

Higher education in Puerto Rico was also subject to United States imperialism. Influence was exerted in two ways. First, research was led by American scientists at centers that followed American modes of investigation.¹⁵⁶ Second, guided by the developmental policies of Operation Bootstrap in the 1940s, Puerto Rico became a laboratory where the United States could investigate and test specific policies before implementing them on the mainland or elsewhere.¹⁵⁷ Domains that were tested relate, for instance, to rapid social change, industrialization, economic development and birth control measures. Particularly during the Cold War, the United States also used the island as a frame of reference to promote and showcase a model of capitalist development.¹⁵⁸ Puerto Rico thus merely became an object of study whereby Puerto Rican scientists lacked a voice of their own. This changed during the 60s and 70s, when United States global hegemony in social sciences decreased whilst scientists on the island simultaneously began to distance themselves from American research techniques. They started to investigate independently and lessened their reliance on American institutions and American colleagues with greater hierarchy and recognition.¹⁵⁹

Scientists were not the only Puerto Ricans that eventually opposed United States policies or the Americanization campaign. Students and teachers, for example, actively opposed the English-only policy in schools and universities by conducting classes in Spanish.¹⁶⁰ Cultural institutions also fought to preserve the Hispanic culture. Since 1898, the Spanish community saw itself as the guardians of Puerto Rican and Spanish culture and fought Americanization in

¹⁵³ Dietz, *Economic History*, 130. According to the director of the Bureau of Education under the military government, “technical and industrial education here will give us a corps of young Puerto Ricans, trained in both the English and Spanish language and in our industrial and commercial methods who will be valuable pioneers in extending our trade in South America ... they ought to accomplish much in extending our commerce and in creating markets for our manufacturers.”

¹⁵⁴ Sotomayor, “Caribbean Soccer,” 199.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 195, 198. Baseball, American football and basketball were particularly introduced as American sports.

¹⁵⁶ Quintero Toro, “¿En qué Anda,” 161, and Méndez, “Las Ciencias Sociales,” 50.

¹⁵⁷ Méndez, “Las Ciencias Sociales,” 50.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 52.

¹⁶⁰ Sotomayor, “Caribbean Soccer,” 198.

business, politics, language and even sports.¹⁶¹ Largely due to these efforts, Puerto Ricans have been able to retain their Latin culture despite its subordination to the United States.¹⁶² Overall, due to pride and a strong sense of cultural identity, the United States never succeeded in completely Americanizing and assimilating the local population to American norms, customs and traditions.¹⁶³ Yet they did succeed in dominating Puerto Rico politically and economically.

The historical analysis makes clear that Puerto Rico has been subjected to United States domination since Spain ceded control of the island to the hegemon. The United States deliberately implemented various policies to keep control out of local hands and to limit the civil and political rights of the local population. Until the 1940s, Puerto Ricans were excluded from political posts that regulated executive policy, their independent economic development was constrained because of restrictions on commercial relationships and trade, and economic dependency was enhanced when American business interests and capital came to dominate economic policies. Although cultural assimilation had failed, political and economic imperialism significantly shaped much of Puerto Rico's current reality. The next chapter will explicate how United States imperialism is observable in the relief aid after Hurricane Maria.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 204.

¹⁶² Safa, "Changing Forms," 9.

¹⁶³ José Javier Colón Morera, "Puerto Rico: A Case of American Imperial Doubts?" *Revista Jurídica Universidad de Puerto Rico* 85, no. 4 (2016): 891, and Safa, "Changing Forms," 34.

3. United States Imperialism in Hurricane Maria Relief Aid

Largely due to federal policies such as PROMESA, the Puerto Rican population suffered from the relationship with the United States in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. Inadequate funding for maintenance projects, for instance, lent a hand to the near complete destruction of the electrical grid. The subsequent lack of communication and information was especially dreadful for the previously mentioned Maritza Stanchich.¹⁶⁴ She recalled that “not knowing about your loved ones” was worse than not having water. It is a feeling that Puerto Ricans in the diaspora share. Diana Isabel Sotomayor, a Puerto Rican woman who studied in Denmark at the time of Hurricane Maria, remembered how emotional it was when she could not contact her parents and grandparents for a week. Her mother even had to drive four hours for a strong enough phone signal to inform Sotomayor about their situation. Unfortunately, those were not the only difficulties that the population had to deal with after Maria. This chapter examines the federal response to Hurricane Maria and reveals that the relief aid was guided by United States imperialism. It inhibited effective recovery, negatively impacted the local population and kept the federal government in control over Puerto Rico’s affairs. Imperialism in the relief aid was expressed through preferential treatment between states and the island in assistance efforts and through economic restraints. The behavior and language use of President Donald Trump furthermore contributed to a lack of help in Puerto Rico.

3.1. Preferential Treatment

The federal government’s response following Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria has been substantially different. Scholars from the University of Michigan reported that Washington “responded on a larger scale and much more quickly across measures of federal money and staffing to Hurricanes Harvey and Irma in Texas and Florida, compared with Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico.”¹⁶⁵ This disparity did not align with storm severity and recovery needs in the different areas and could substantially affect deaths and recovery rates.¹⁶⁶ An investigation by *Politico* reviewed public documents, FEMA records and interviews with more than 50 people involved in the disaster responses and likewise underscored that the federal government

¹⁶⁴ Erin Brodwin, “Puerto Ricans Describe.”

¹⁶⁵ Charley E. Willison et al, "Quantifying Inequities in US Federal Response to Hurricane Disaster in Texas and Florida Compared with Puerto Rico," *BMJ Global Health* 4 (2019): 1.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 4.

“exerted a faster, and initially greater, effort in Texas,” although Houston was less severely damaged than Puerto Rico.¹⁶⁷

Preferential treatment between states and Puerto Rico regarding relief aid reveals United States imperialism on the island. A lack of, or a slow, disaster response in Puerto Rico compared to Texas and Florida indicates Puerto Rico’s subordination. According to political scientist Scott Greer it is “a reminder of the penalties of not being fully represented in federal politics.”¹⁶⁸ He refers to the political pressure that states, but not Puerto Rico, can put on the federal government to elicit aid. With only one nonvoting delegate in Congress, the island has no delegation of lawmakers or congressional staff who can exert influence on FEMA or the federal government.¹⁶⁹ Texas, by contrast, has 36 representatives and 2 senators who can demand resources for their state.

The preferential treatment is expressed through differences in response time regarding monetary assistance, the deployment of staff and the delivery of supplies. In monetary terms, Texas and Florida had received more funds in a relatively shorter amount of time. Within the first nine days after Harvey and Irma, FEMA had awarded about \$100 million to survivors of both storms while Maria survivors had received \$6.2 million.¹⁷⁰ In the first two months, this amount rose to \$1.28 billion for Harvey and \$899 million for Irma survivors. In contrast, it took four months for Maria survivors to hit the \$1 billion mark.¹⁷¹ The difference in time frames is also noticeable in the staff that was sent to assist. Within the first nine days after the hurricanes made landfall, FEMA posted 30,000 federal employees in Texas, 16,200 in Florida and 10,000 in Puerto Rico to help local and state authorities with search-and-rescue missions, the removal of debris and other operations.¹⁷² After one month, this number had increased to its peak of 19,000 employees on the island, which was still short of the 31,000 peak for Texas.¹⁷³ Moreover, after Harvey, it took six days before the United States Northern Command deployed 73 crucially needed helicopters to Texas to rescue people from remote and flooded areas and to deliver emergency supplies.¹⁷⁴ In the first days, the Northern Command sent around a dozen

¹⁶⁷ Danny Vinik, “How Trump Favored Texas over Puerto Rico,” *Politico*, March 27, 2018. <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/03/27/donald-trump-fema-hurricane-maria-response-480557> (Accessed February 26, 2020).

¹⁶⁸ Michigan News. University of Michigan, “Less Hurricane Aid, Slower Response to Puerto Rico than to Texas, Florida,” January 21, 2019. <https://news.umich.edu/less-hurricane-aid-slower-response-to-puerto-rico-than-to-texas-florida/> (Accessed February 25, 2020).

¹⁶⁹ Vinik, “How Trump Favored Texas.”

¹⁷⁰ Willison et al, “Quantifying Inequities,” 2, and Vinik, “How Trump Favored Texas.”

¹⁷¹ Willison et al, “Quantifying Inequities,” 2, and Michigan News, “Less Hurricane Aid.”

¹⁷² Willison et al, “Quantifying Inequities,” 2, and Vinik, “How Trump Favored Texas.”

¹⁷³ Willison et al, “Quantifying Inequities,” 2.

¹⁷⁴ Vinik, “How Trump Favored Texas.”

helicopters to Puerto Rico and three weeks went by before more than 70 helicopters were sent to the island.¹⁷⁵ The discrepancy in response time is furthermore highlighted by the fact that it took FEMA just 10 days to approve permanent disaster work for Texas, while Puerto Rico had to wait 43 days for this approval.¹⁷⁶ The installment of blue roofs by the Army Corps of Engineers – hard plastic covers that are put on roofs so that victims can return home before permanent repair work starts – also indicates preferential treatment. In the first 25 days after Irma, 1,600 of an estimated 15,000 blue roofs were installed in Florida.¹⁷⁷ This equals 10.7 percent of the total. In the same time period after Maria, the Army Corps had installed just 260 of 60,000 blue roofs, which is 0.4 percent of the entirety.

The delivery of supplies, such as food, water and tarps, follows the same trend. In Puerto Rico it was slower to arrive and less in quantity compared to Texas and Florida.¹⁷⁸ During the first nine days after Harvey, FEMA distributed 5.1 million meals, 4.5 million liters of water and around 20,000 tarps to Texas. On the island, in comparison, it provided 1.6 million meals, 2.8 million liters of water and some 5,000 tarps.¹⁷⁹ Puerto Ricans such as the Mayor of Ponce, María Meléndez, reported that the distribution of supplies was not enough and that many parts of the island were left out.¹⁸⁰ Medicines, for example, were not reaching hospitals in southern Puerto Rico. The delivery of supplies eventually caused controversy and highlights negligence on part of both the federal and local government. First, FEMA awarded a \$156 million contract to a one-person company that delivered only 50,000 of the expected 30 million meals.¹⁸¹ FEMA canceled the contract 20 days later but reassured that food distribution was not affected at the time of termination. Second, in January 2020 a warehouse full of unused emergency supplies earmarked for Maria's relief aid were found in Ponce.¹⁸² The supplies included thousands of sealed cases of water, food, cots, tarps, diapers and baby formula, and were discovered when the building was inspected after an earthquake hit the island on January 7, 2020.¹⁸³ The director

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Willison et al, "Quantifying Inequities," 2.

¹⁷⁹ Vinik, "How Trump Favored Texas."

¹⁸⁰ Gabriel Stargardter and Dave Graham, "Trump Lays Blame."

¹⁸¹ Susan Heavey, "FEMA Contractor did not Deliver Millions of Puerto Rico Meals: Lawmakers," *Reuters*, February 6, 2018. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-puertorico-meals/fema-contractor-did-not-deliver-millions-of-puerto-rico-meals-lawmakers-idUSKBN1FQ2OP> (Accessed February 21, 2020).

¹⁸² Associated Press, "Puerto Rico Residents Outraged after Discovering Warehouse Full of Unused Aid from Hurricane Maria," *NBC News*, January 19, 2020. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/puerto-rico-residents-outraged-after-discovering-warehouse-full-unused-aid-n118501> (Accessed February 27, 2020).

¹⁸³ Joshua Hoyos and Ella Torres, "Puerto Rico's Emergency Services Director Fired after Warehouse Discovered with Supplies from Hurricane Maria," *ABC News*, January 20, 2020. <https://abcnews.go.com/US/puerto-ricos-emergency-services-director-fired-warehouse-discovered/story?id=68374426> (Accessed February 27, 2020), and Karma Allen, Joshua Hoyos and Ella Torres, "Puerto Rico Refers Investigation into Unused Emergency Supplies

of Puerto Rico's Office of Emergency Management, Carlos Acevedo, who was responsible for the warehouse and was fired after the discovery, asserted that "no citizen has been denied any of the items found at this place."¹⁸⁴ Yet the negligence understandably enraged many Puerto Ricans, especially those that were already upset about the lack of assistance.¹⁸⁵

3.2. Economic Restraints

It is important to acknowledge that the White House has allocated more than \$40 billion for the recovery efforts.¹⁸⁶ This money was desperately needed given the economic situation of the island. Yet some of this amount had been blocked by the government, was otherwise constrained by bureaucratic hurdles or was intended to be given in the form of a loan instead of a grant, which would further burden the economy.

Federal control over relief efforts became clear when Washington blocked much needed relief funding. For months, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) withheld \$8.2 billion in grants.¹⁸⁷ Distrustful lawmakers missed the deadline to publish the funding notice as they first wanted to ensure that financial safeguards were put in place on the island. The administration used concerns about corruptions and mismanagement of funds as justification for blocking the grant.¹⁸⁸ President Trump, for instance, had questioned sending relief aid to Puerto Rico over fear of mismanagement.¹⁸⁹ A statement by the White House furthermore read that Puerto Rico would receive a historic amount of aid, "in spite of the fact that it has repeatedly failed to manage its finances appropriately."¹⁹⁰ HUD Secretary Ben Carson reiterated this skepticism when he explained why Puerto Rico had not yet received the money. HUD would release funds in two tranches whereby a distinction was made between states on the one hand and Puerto Rico and the United States Virgin Islands on the other. Carson

to DOJ," *ABC News*, January 21, 2020. <https://abcnews.go.com/US/puerto-rico-distributes-supplies-left-rot-warehouse/story?id=68409678> (Accessed February 27, 2020). Supplies that were not expired would be distributed to the communities that were most affected by the earthquake.

¹⁸⁴ Joshua Hoyos and Ella Torres, "Puerto Rico's Emergency"

¹⁸⁵ Associated Press, "Puerto Rico Residents"

¹⁸⁶ White House Fact Sheets, "Rebuilding Puerto Rico Efficiently and Accountably," *WhiteHouse.gov*, April 4, 2019. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/rebuilding-puerto-rico-efficiently-accountably/> (Accessed February 22, 2020).

¹⁸⁷ Katy O'Donnell, "Trump to Lift Hold on \$8.2B in Puerto Rico Disaster Aid," *Politico*, January 15, 2020. <https://www.politico.com/news/2020/01/15/trump-to-lift-hold-on-82b-in-puerto-rico-disaster-aid-099139> (Accessed February 22, 2020).

¹⁸⁸ Brakkton Booker, "Months After Blowing Deadline, Trump Administration Lifts Hold on Puerto Rico Aid," *NPR*, January 15, 2020. <https://www.npr.org/2020/01/15/796658767/months-after-blowing-deadline-trump-administration-lifts-hold-on-puerto-rico-aid?t=1579200095349> (Accessed February 22, 2020).

¹⁸⁹ Bobby Allyn, "FBI Arrests Former Top Puerto Rico Officials In Government Corruption Scandal," *NPR*, July 11, 2019. <https://www.npr.org/2019/07/11/740596170/fbi-arrests-former-top-puerto-rico-officials-in-government-corruption-scandal> (Accessed February 23, 2020).

¹⁹⁰ White House Fact Sheets, "Rebuilding Puerto Rico."

stated that recovery efforts “should not be held back due to alleged corruption, fiscal irregularities and financial mismanagement occurring in Puerto Rico” and that funding through the two tranches would “help recovery and planning move forward in communities capable of properly and prudently disbursing funds, all the while protecting taxpayers who are footing the bill.”¹⁹¹

Such distrust is not entirely unfounded. The FBI arrested two top officials in Puerto Rico for illegally directing \$15.5 million in federal funds to favored businesses and politically connected contractors.¹⁹² They granted contracts to unqualified firms who paid commissions to other individuals to lobby the government for more contracts.¹⁹³ To make matters worse, a FEMA official that oversaw the restoration of the electrical system was arrested for taking bribes from one of the companies that received \$1.8 billion in federal contracts to rebuild the power grid.¹⁹⁴ These events have been highly unfavorable in light of the insular government’s attempts to project a positive image of itself to Congress.¹⁹⁵ Not surprisingly, it led to concerns in Washington about the approved grants. Besides, the island’s allies feared that the arrests would give the Trump administration greater justification for curtailing badly needed aid to Puerto Rico.¹⁹⁶ To mitigate risks and prevent further corruption, HUD would only release the funds if a Federal Register notice would be published with outlines of the grant agreement and details about its distributions.¹⁹⁷ After fulfilling this requirement, a HUD official stated that “now that a full financial monitoring team is assembled and active, we can move forward with confidence that these disaster recovery funds will reach those who need them the most.”¹⁹⁸ Nevertheless, as Rep. Nydia Velázquez (D-NY) stated, the delay in releasing the funds highlights the administration’s disdain for the people of Puerto Rico.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹¹ United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, “HUD to Release Mitigation Funds in Two Tranches,” *HUD Public Affairs*, August 2, 2019. https://www.hud.gov/press/press_releases_media_advisories/HUD_No_19_117 (Accessed February 22, 2020).

¹⁹² Jeff Stein, “FBI Makes Arrests in Puerto Rico Corruption Scandal, Prompting Calls for Governor’s Ouster and Concerns about Billions in Storm Aid,” *Washington Post*, July 11, 2019. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2019/07/10/fbi-makes-arrests-puerto-rico-corruption-scandal-prompting-calls-governors-ouster-concerns-about-billions-storm-aid/> (Accessed February 23, 2020).

¹⁹³ Bobby Allyn, “FBI Arrests.”

¹⁹⁴ Mark Moore, “Former Top FEMA Official Busted for Taking Bribes after Hurricane Maria,” *New York Post*, September 10, 2019. <https://nypost.com/2019/09/10/former-top-fema-official-busted-for-taking-bribes-after-hurricane-maria/> (Accessed February 23, 2020).

¹⁹⁵ Bobby Allyn, “FBI Arrests.”

¹⁹⁶ Jeff Stein, “FBI Makes Arrests.”

¹⁹⁷ Yaron Steinbuch, “Trump Ending Hold of \$8B in Puerto Rico Disaster Aid Relief,” *New York Post*, January 15, 2020. <https://nypost.com/2020/01/15/trump-ending-hold-of-8b-in-puerto-rico-disaster-aid-relief/> (Accessed February 22, 2020).

¹⁹⁸ Katy O’Donnell, “Trump to Lift Hold.”

¹⁹⁹ Brakkton Booker, “Months After.”

Bureaucratic hurdles also constrained Puerto Rico's actions. In February 2020, for instance, the governor of Puerto Rico - Wanda Vázquez Garced – received an agreement of \$8.2 billion in funds from HUD's Community Development Block Grant for the aftermath of Maria. The agreement, however, included restrictions by which the federal government kept control over recovery efforts. It was ordered that PROMESA's Fiscal Oversight Board would approve projects, that an executive order by former governor Ricardo Rosselló Nevares – which stated that reconstruction workers were to be paid \$15 per hour with federal funds – would be reversed and that the insular government demonstrated compliance with the reform of property registry.²⁰⁰ Bureaucratic hurdles also caused delays in the granting of funds. Disputes between federal government officials and their peers on the island about new funding approval processes led to the delay of at least \$1 billion in recovery aid.²⁰¹ Following a new funding process adopted after Hurricane Sandy in 2012, FEMA and the Puerto Rican government would base financial support on fixed estimates whereby any additional costs would be borne by Puerto Rico, instead of relying on actual, documented costs for project reimbursements.²⁰² On paper, this process would accelerate the release of grants because it allows for one combined endowment instead of individual grants for varying projects. In practice, however, it complicated efforts. There were disagreements about how exactly to determine cost estimates and Trump allegedly refused to recognize those issued by Puerto Rican engineers.²⁰³ Besides, according to several congressional officials and people with direct knowledge of the process, Governor Ricardo Rosselló was forced to agree to the deal or else he would not get the money.²⁰⁴ The White House denied the accusations and Mike Byrne of FEMA even stated that “the governor put it in writing that that's how he wanted it done.”²⁰⁵ Rosselló voiced that Washington was not explicit in its orders, but that “they were very adamant” about it.²⁰⁶ The disputes delayed relief aid because FEMA could only release funds when all parties agreed to the formula and estimates.

²⁰⁰ Gloria Ruiz Kuilan, “La Gobernadora Recibió el Segundo Acuerdo para el Desembolso de \$8,200 Millones en Fondos CDBG-DR,” *Nuevo Día*, February 24, 2020. <https://www.elnuevodia.com/noticias/politica/nota/lagobernadorarecibioelsegundoacuerdoparaeldesembolso8200millonesenfondoscdbg-dr-2548809/> (Accessed March 5, 2020).

²⁰¹ Ledyard King, “2 Years after Hurricanes, Trump Administration has OK'd only 9 Projects for Funding in Puerto Rico,” *USA TODAY*, December 15, 2019. <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2019/07/18/trump-tweets-puerto-ricos-irma-maria-hurricane-recovery-trickles/1758820001/> (Accessed February 22, 2020).

²⁰² FEMA, *2017 Hurricane Season*, 7.

²⁰³ Ledyard King, “2 Years after Hurricanes.”

²⁰⁴ Vinik, “How Trump Favored Texas.”

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

Part of the funds, however, would be distributed as loans instead of grants, although they were eventually denied altogether.²⁰⁷ At first, Puerto Rico would receive a \$4.9 billion loan while other areas impacted by the 2017 hurricane season would divide the rest of the \$36.5 billion disaster relief bill as a grant. The loan was intended to contribute to day-to-day operations, but it was cancelled after FEMA and the Treasury Department discovered that Puerto Rico had a cash balance of \$1.7 billion for ongoing operations and \$68 billion in diverse local government accounts.²⁰⁸ FEMA official Alex Amparo and Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Treasury Gary Grippo stated that the insular government did not need the funding at that time and that funds would “be provided through the [Community Disaster Loans Program] when the Commonwealth’s central cash balance decreases to a certain level.”²⁰⁹ In essence, Puerto Rico was deemed not poor enough to qualify for emergency loans despite its massive debt and although it has proved unable to carry out many vital governmental functions.²¹⁰ It is yet another example of the federal government’s control over Puerto Rico’s economy and its recovery mission.

3.3. Behavior and Language Use

As previously mentioned, United States domination of Puerto Rico was partly motivated by a sense of racial superiority. The island was seen as a backward society with inferior, deviant inhabitants in need of civilization. This reasoning is implicitly reflected in the behavior and language use of President Trump after Maria and plausibly guided imperialist policies. Indifference, a lack of concern or negative comments about the disaster send a subtle, yet important message to the federal bureaucracy and the nation that the situation does not need to be prioritized.²¹¹ This is emphasized by James Norton, a former senior official in the Department of Homeland Security, who argued that “public appearances and visits to storm-wrecked regions play an important role in establishing priorities within the federal government.”²¹² The attention drives the bureaucracy and a lack thereof impacts the level of recovery effort.

²⁰⁷ David Dayen, “Trump Administration Tells Puerto Rico It’s too Rich for Aid Money,” *Intercept*, January 18, 2018. <https://theintercept.com/2018/01/18/puerto-rico-trump-administration-tells-its-too-rich-for-aid-money/> (Accessed February 25, 2020).

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ Vinik, “How Trump Favored Texas.”

²¹² *Ibid.*

President Trump's behavior and comments after Maria gave the impression that the situation is not that grave and could be dealt with rather nonchalantly. The president did not travel to the island until 13 days after the storm made landfall, stating that he did not want to thwart the relief operations.²¹³ Instead, he spent the first weekend after Maria at his private golf club where he discussed his newest travel ban, but not the hurricane.²¹⁴ Unsurprisingly, this led to fierce criticism. Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), for instance, said that "the definition of 'poor leadership' is sitting at your golf club while millions of U.S. citizens beg for your help."²¹⁵ When he eventually did visit the island, his tour did not include the most impacted areas. In fact, he visited one of the least-affected communities where most houses were made of cement.²¹⁶ A National Security Council spokesperson justified this decision, because security measures would otherwise "have required that rescue and relief efforts be temporarily redirected, which is not what the president wanted."²¹⁷ During his visit he furthermore offended and humiliated the population by throwing paper towels, while impersonating a basketball player, into a crowd of Puerto Ricans in need of aid.²¹⁸ Eduardo Bhatia – the minority leader of Puerto Rico's Senate – argued that Trump's visit "made it very clear that he did not think this was a big deal" and that "he was making a joke out of it."²¹⁹ It clearly illustrates Trump's indifferent attitude toward the disaster and the island.

The president's language use likewise suggests that one should not focus on Puerto Rico extensively and that the humanitarian crisis in part is its own fault. Although on September 20 and 21 he showed empathy toward the island, it took him four days to address the crisis again.²²⁰ In the meantime, it was more important to criticize North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un or repeatedly denounce National Football League (NFL) players who protested police brutality

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Abby Phillip et al, "Lost Weekend: How Trump's Time at his Golf Club Hurt the Response to Maria," *Washington Post*, September 30, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/lost-weekend-how-trumps-time-at-his-golf-club-hurt-the-response-to-maria/2017/09/29/ce92ed0a-a522-11e7-8c37-e1d99ad6aa22_story.html (Accessed March 5, 2020).

²¹⁵ Gabriel Stargardter and Dave Graham, "Trump Lays Blame."

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Pablo de Llano, "Trump Lanza Rollos de Papel a los Damnificados del Huracán María en Puerto Rico," *País*, October 4, 2017. https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/10/03/estados-unidos/1507056769_135455.html (Accessed February 20, 2020), and Ewan Palmer, "Florida Democrats Unveil 'Never Forget' Trump Paper Towel-Throwing Billboard Ahead of Mike Pence Visit," *Newsweek*, January 15, 2020. <https://www.newsweek.com/florida-democrats-unveil-never-forget-trump-paper-towel-throwing-billboard-ahead-mike-pence-visit-1482284> (Accessed February 25, 2020).

²¹⁹ Vinik, "How Trump Favored Texas."

²²⁰ Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump), "Puerto Rico being hit hard by new monster Hurricane. Be careful, our hearts are with you- will be there to help!" Twitter, September 20, 2017, 4:23 am. <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/910328626075389952> and Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump). "Governor @RicardoRossello - We are with you and the people of Puerto Rico. Stay safe! #PRStrong." Twitter, September 21, 5:13 am. <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/910703407555600386>

during the national anthem.²²¹ Notwithstanding his initial sympathy, his overall focus has persistently been on provoking political conflict instead of worrying about the fate of the population. He verbally attacked local Puerto Rican leaders, such as San Juan Mayor Carmen Yulín Cruz, who allegedly had “poor leadership ability.”²²² With this, he replied to her critique of the slow relief response. In April 2019, he again attacked local Puerto Rican politicians with regards to the hurricane relief operations. He stated that local leaders were “incompetent or corrupt,” that the “government can’t do anything right,” and that “politicians like the crazed and incompetent Mayor of San Juan have done such a poor job of bringing the Island back to health.”²²³ Other significant parts of this tweet are that the president distinguishes between the mainland and the island and that he prioritizes the former while subordinating the latter. He cites that Puerto Rico had received \$91 billion in funds by which it took money “away from our farmers and so many others.” Herewith Trump created an “us” versus “them” dichotomy. In the tweet, Trump also asserted that Puerto Rican officials “only take from USA,” not acknowledging or realizing that Puerto Rico is part of the United States. He furthermore uttered that one “cannot continue to hurt our Farmers and States with these massive payments, and so little appreciation!” again distinguishing between continental United States and the island.

In the days following Maria, he furthermore blamed the island for its situation. Part of why Puerto Rico was “in deep trouble” after the hurricane made landfall is because it “was already suffering from broken infrastructure & massive debt.”²²⁴ This was his first remark

²²¹ Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Twitter, September 22, 2017, 12:28 pm. <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/911175246853664768> and Vinik, “How Trump Favored Texas.” On Twitter, Trump stated that Kim Jong Un was “obviously a madman who doesn’t mind starving or killing his people” and that he “will be tested like never before!” Besides, in the first week after Maria made landfall, Trump tweeted 18 times about NFL players and just 8 times about Hurricane Maria and Puerto Rico.

²²² Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Twitter, September 30, 2017, 1:19 pm. <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/914087234869047296> Apparently, the Mayor of San Juan was “told by Democrats that you must be nasty to Trump.” He furthermore mentioned that she and others in Puerto Rico had poor leadership abilities and were unable to get their workers to help. He claimed that “They want everything to be done for them when it should be a community effort.”

²²³ Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Twitter, April 2, 2019, 4:50 am. <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1112910106004504576> Trump praised the people of Puerto Rico, but criticized the politicians who “are incompetent or corrupt.” They “can’t do anything right” and “the place is a mess - nothing works.” After applauding the work of FEMA and the military, he stated that “politicians like the crazed and incompetent Mayor of San Juan have done such a poor job of bringing the Island back to health.” He complained that the democrats wanted to spend more money on Puerto Rico, which would take away funding for farmers. The island apparently got “more money than has ever been gotten for a hurricane before, & all their local politicians do is complain & ask for more money.” He furthermore tweeted that Puerto Rican politicians “are grossly incompetent, spend the money foolishly or corruptly, & only take from USA.” In his eyes, his presidency was “the best thing that ever happened to Puerto Rico,” although the “bad Island leadership” and wasted money should not continue “to hurt our Farmers and States with these massive payments, and so little appreciation!”

²²⁴ Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Twitter, September 25, 2017. <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/912478274508423168> According to Trump, “Puerto Rico, which was already suffering from broken infrastructure & massive debt, is in deep trouble. It’s old electrical grid, which was

regarding the disaster after his NFL feud and his four-day silence on Maria. While lives were at stake it apparently was critical to focus on the “billions of dollars owed to Wall Street and the banks which, sadly, must be dealt with.”²²⁵ In other ways he also revealed that the circumstances of the population were not his main concern. In the wake of the hurricane, the accounts of the official death rates had been varied. Initially, the official death count stood at 64, but independent investigations reported more than 1,000 or even 4,600 deaths.²²⁶ Trump did not believe these differences and insinuated that raising the official death count “was done by the Democrats in order to make me look as bad as possible when I was successfully raising Billions of Dollars to help rebuild Puerto Rico.”²²⁷ He went on to mock the severity of the situation, writing, “if a person died for any reason, like old age, just add them onto the list.”

With his behavior and language use, Trump thus sends the message that monetary affairs but especially political opponents are more important than the circumstances and lives of the people of Puerto Rico. This feeds into the notion that Puerto Ricans are regarded as inferior. Together with the difference in relief aid between states and the island, and the bureaucratic hurdles that impeded economic assistance, it indicates how imperialism has shaped the relief aid after Hurricane Maria.

in terrible shape, was devastated. Much of the Island was destroyed, with billions of dollars owed to Wall Street and the banks which, sadly, must be dealt with.”

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Nishant Kishore et al, “Mortality in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria,” *The New England Journal of Medicine* 379, no. 2 (2018): 167.

²²⁷ Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Twitter, September 13, 2018, 2:37 pm. <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1040217897703026689> Trump claimed that “3000 people did not die in the two hurricanes that hit Puerto Rico.” After his visit to the island, “they had anywhere from 6 to 18 deaths” but after a while “they started to report really large numbers, like 3000. This was done by the Democrats in order to make me look as bad as possible when I was successfully raising Billions of Dollars to help rebuild Puerto Rico. If a person died for any reason, like old age, just add them onto the list. Bad politics.”

4. Conclusion

The emotions expressed by Maria Stanchich, the man in the documentary and Diana Isabel Sotomayor make President Trump's unsympathetic comments incomprehensible. Millions of people suffered mentally and physically, and too many Puerto Ricans died after Hurricane Maria devastated the island in 2017. In this study, it is argued that United States imperialism was the reason for ineffective relief aid in Puerto Rico. Imperialist policies were expressed through a difference in treatment between states and the island, through economic restraints and bureaucratic hurdles and through a negative and indifferent attitude toward the needs of the island and its population.

The relief aid indicates a continuation of the imperial policies that the United States has implemented since 1898 and reveals San Juan's inferiority relative to Washington. The political subordination in the relief aid is shown through a preferential treatment between states and the island. States received more money, more personnel, more material assistance – for instance in the form of helicopters – and more supplies in a shorter amount of time. This is remarkable because the storm severity and needs of the population in the states did not align with the damage and needs on the island. The dissimilarity can be explained by a difference in political leverage. Puerto Rico is not fully represented in federal politics and therefore cannot pressure the government as states can. It indicates a continuity of imperialist practices, because the island has been subordinated to the will of Congress since 1898 whereby it always lacked the means for complete self-determination. Even after the island became a Commonwealth in 1952, Congress retained power over island affairs. Puerto Rico's subordinate position hindered effective aid because it lacked a voice to demand necessary assistance.

The power of the federal government over island affairs also becomes apparent in the economic domain. Puerto Rico's inferiority is revealed through the economic restraints and bureaucratic hurdles that impeded the recovery efforts. The United States used its dominance to withhold billions of dollars, which would only be released if measures were taken to prevent mismanagement and corruption. Some funds were delayed because of bureaucratic hurdles, such as disputes about new funding processes, while others were denied entirely because Puerto Rico's cash balance was deemed too high. The decisions demonstrate a continuance of economic control by the federal government. Historically, the United States had constrained the island's independent economic development and guided insular policies through the dominance of its capital and interests. After Maria, United States capital likewise dominated decision-making processes, which caused delays in the relief effort.

The subordination of Puerto Ricans has been prompted by notions of racial superiority in the past. Inhabitants needed to culturally assimilate to reflect the image of the American. This notion was again underscored by comments and actions of President Trump after the hurricane. With ridiculing and not prioritizing the relief effort he in all likelihood prompted a lack of concern for Puerto Rico with other federal government officials. For Trump, it was more important to complain about athletes, attack domestic and foreign politicians, and criticize Puerto Rico's financial situation than it was to assist the badly suffering local population. It stresses that Puerto Ricans are inferior to politics and money.

Overall, the evaluation of the federal response after Hurricane Maria devastated Puerto Rico indicates that imperialism shaped the relief aid. An analysis of the preferential treatment, economic restraints and verbal and nonverbal communication reveals that Puerto Rico remains subject to the will of Congress, which out of self-interest keeps control over the island even when a humanitarian crisis destroys it. It indicates, in conclusion, that imperialism still guides the United States – Puerto Rico relationship and that after the devastation of the island, the Trump administration did not try or intend to make Puerto Rico great again.

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