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## Climate Change, Colonialism, and Second-Class Citizenry: A Case Study of the Impacts of Hurricane María in Puerto Rico

Aislyne Calianos  
aislyne@my.uri.edu

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Climate change, colonialism, and second-class citizenry:  
A case study of the impacts of Hurricane María in Puerto Rico

Aislyne Calianos  
The University of Rhode Island  
Senior Honors Project  
Dr. Megan Echevarría  
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## Introduction

The 2017 hurricane season brought unprecedented devastation to the Caribbean and the American South. In the months following the impacts from Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and María, evidence mounted that the United States did not approach the emergency responses and long-term recovery efforts for each of these storms in the same way. While aid arrived quickly in Texas and Florida, Puerto Rico was left without reliable access to food, water, and electricity for months. Even today, more than six months after Hurricane María made landfall in Puerto Rico, thousands of Americans are still living without electricity. Moreover, the national discourse about relief for Puerto Rico differed greatly from those regarding other states, and political criticisms and altercations abounded as the island struggled to regain its footing. This unequal treatment, and undue suffering in Puerto Rico stems from the island's colonial history, which continues to unfold to this day. As a modern colony of the US, Puerto Rico faced particular social, financial, and political challenges in its fight to recover from Hurricane María. As climate change increases the likelihood that another disaster may strike sooner rather than later, the inequality and second-class citizenry endured by Puerto Ricans will continue to be thrust into the national spotlight, until eventually, it can no longer be ignored.

## Background & History

Puerto Rico is a small Caribbean island that is situated east of the Dominican Republic, and is about 1,000 miles southeast of Florida. The island measures about 3,500 square miles, which is just under three times the size of Rhode Island.<sup>1</sup> According to anthropologist Sydney Mintz, who authored multiple publications on Puerto Rico's people and cultural history, the island "is part of the oldest colonial area in the world," and was one of the last colonies to be surrendered by the Spanish empire.<sup>2</sup> A brief overview of Puerto Rico's colonial history, and its place in the greater context of Caribbean history, is vital for developing an understanding of the current status of the United States-Puerto Rico Relationship.

In 1508, Spanish conquistador Juan Ponce de León received permission from the Spanish government to colonize the island called *Boriquén* by its native inhabitants. Soon afterwards, the colony was renamed "Puerto Rico," and a new economic and land ownership regime termed *repartimiento* was put into place by the Spanish.<sup>3</sup> Under this system, land was divided up and given to citizens of Spain who came to settle on the island; along with this package came a number of indigenous people who were to work the land. Eventually, as indigenous workers died en masse, likely due to disease, the Spanish began replacing them with imported slaves from West Africa.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> CIA. (2018). The World Factbook, Central America and the Caribbean: Puerto Rico. *Central Intelligence Agency*. Retrieved from: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rq.html>

<sup>2</sup> Mintz, S. (1966). *Status of Puerto Rico: Selected background studies prepared for the United States-Puerto Rico Commission on the status of Puerto Rico*. Pp. 339-435. Retrieved from: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=pur1.32754062028323;view=1up;seq=429>

<sup>3</sup> Vivas, J. L. (1962). *Historia de Puerto Rico*. New York: Las Americas. p. 76

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

This pattern of colonization, land repartition, and marginalization, was repeated many times over in other European colonies throughout the Caribbean and the Americas, creating a system of plantations which not only supplied Europe with highly demanded goods like sugar and tobacco, but also set the stage for an era of political dependence that continues to endure to this day.<sup>5</sup>

Nearly four hundred years later, control of Puerto Rico finally shifted from the hands of the Spanish to those of the United States. Since 1848, the US has relied on a series of laws and judicial decisions to determine the status of Puerto Rico and its people, each of which contain strong colonial overtones. Beginning with the Foraker Act in 1900, the first major piece of legislation regarding Puerto Rico, the federal government crafted a civil government for the island, which consisted of a governor and Supreme Court appointed by the President of the United States.<sup>6</sup>

In the years that followed, a series of cases decided by the US Supreme Court referred to as the Insular Cases, further codified the status of Puerto Rico and other territories of the US. Perhaps most importantly, the Insular Cases determined that incorporated territories of the US only included those that were “assured eventual statehood” upon their acquisition, such as Louisiana and Alaska.<sup>7</sup> This indicates that, by default, unincorporated territories are those that had “no commitment of eventual statehood,” such as Puerto Rico and Guam.<sup>8</sup> Another outcome of the Insular Cases was the determination in the matter of *Downes v. Bidwell*, that only the most “fundamental” constitutional provisions applied to unincorporated territories, allowing the basic principles of governance and individual rights to be selectively applied to these cases. In his dissent to this finding, Justice Harlan summed up the hypocrisy of denying full constitutional rights to territories of the US as follows:

“The idea that this country may acquire territories anywhere upon the earth, by conquest or treaty, and hold them as mere colonies or provinces- the people inhabiting them to enjoy only such rights as Congress chooses to accord to them- is wholly inconsistent with the spirit and genius as well as with the words of the Constitution.”<sup>9</sup>

Essentially, as the Insular Cases proved, the title of “unincorporated territory,” is a thinly veiled linguistic trick, which allows the United States to maintain colonial relationships with its unincorporated territories without naming them as such.<sup>10</sup>

In 1917, the passage of the Jones-Shafroth Act established two major policy shifts towards Puerto Rico: first, Puerto Ricans were granted full U.S. citizenship, and second,

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<sup>5</sup> Mintz, S. (1966).

<sup>6</sup> Torruella, R. (1998). ¿Hacia dónde vas Puerto Rico? *The Yale Law Journal*, 107(5), pp. 1503-1522.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> *Downes v. Bidwell*, 182 U.S. 244 (1901). Retrieved from: <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/182/244/case.html>

<sup>10</sup> Torruella, R. (1998).

it established an elected (rather than Presidentially appointed) legislature on the island.<sup>11</sup> The question of whether or not Puerto Rican citizens were truly equal to the citizens of incorporated territories and states was addressed five years later when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in the matter of *Balzac v. Porto Rico*, “the granting of citizenship to Puerto Ricans did not mean that Congress had expressed an intention of eventually incorporating Puerto Rico as a state...the Act merely allowed the residents of Puerto Rico free entry into the United States, where they could exercise full rights at citizens.”<sup>12</sup> *Balzac v. Porto Rico* firmly cemented Puerto Ricans’ status as second-class citizens, and served to keep the political status of the island in limbo indefinitely, by assuring that no promises regarding statehood and equality were made.

Here it is also important to note that another piece of legislature referred to as the Jones Act was passed in 1920. This law is also called the Merchant Marine Act, and while it is distinct from the Jones-Shafroth Act, it is still relevant to Puerto Rico. The Jones Act of 1920 has to do with the US merchant marine, and protecting American interests in national shipping and interstate commerce. Following World War II, this law established cabotage regulations that required a ship to be registered in the United States in order to transport goods from one domestic port to another. This stipulation was designed to protect and maintain a fleet of American shipping vessels for both economic and national security purposes. Additionally, the Jones Act of 1920 contains several regulations requiring U.S. flagged vessels to maintain certain safety conditions onboard, and contains provisions that require shipping companies to be held responsible for the safety of their crews.<sup>13</sup> This law became an important subject of debate as it arose in relation to the ability of foreign ships to transport emergency supplies to Puerto Rico in the aftermath of Hurricane María.

The final piece of major legislation that must be examined is the Puerto Rico Federal Relations Act of 1950, or Public Law 600, which allowed the territory to write its own constitution, and created the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. The Puerto Rican constitution could only be passed once it received approval from the United States Congress, indicating that the federal government has no intention of truly relinquishing control over the political landscape of the island. Public Law 600 contains no clear definition of what the new designation of “Commonwealth” actually entails, and for all intents and purposes it seems that this title is merely cosmetic.<sup>14</sup>

Through this process of historical and political reflection, we can draw a clear line connecting the policies and attitudes regarding Puerto Rico and other unincorporated island territories of the US to the colonial structures set in place centuries ago. While ownership of the island and its people has shifted from the hands of the Spanish to those of the United States, the relationship- one of “ownership”- has continued to endure to this

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<sup>11</sup> Torruella, R. (1998).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Carey, T. (2017). “The Jones Act, explained (and what waiving it means for Puerto Rico.” *PBS News Hour*. Retrieved from: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/jones-act-explained-waiving-means-puerto-rico>

<sup>14</sup> Torruella, R. (1998).

day. The federal government may have used official terms as euphemisms to mask the fact that the United States is in fact a colonial power, but has done little in the realm of concrete political change to elevate its territorial holdings, and the people residing within them, above their colonial status.

### **Moment of impact: Hurricane María**

On September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017, an environmental catastrophe the likes of which had not been seen in nearly one hundred years, struck the island territory of Puerto Rico. Hurricane María brought sustained winds of 155 miles-per-hour- just three miles-per-hour short of reaching a category five classification- and on some parts of the island, dropped as much rain in one day as Houston, Texas received over the course of three days during Hurricane Harvey weeks before.<sup>15</sup> To further complicate matters, Puerto Rico was still recovering from a close brush with Hurricane Irma just two weeks earlier, which had knocked out electricity to two-thirds of the island, and had caused nearly one-third of the population to lose access to clean water. Hurricane María left the entire island without electricity, and six days after the storm, nearly half of the population did not have access to potable water.<sup>16</sup> Around 250,000 homes were partially or completely damaged,<sup>17</sup> and although the official death toll of the storm sits at 64 people, there is much speculation as to whether this number is accurate; some groups claim that the total could be more than 1,000 lives lost.<sup>18</sup>

### **Recovery in Puerto Rico**

It has been more than six months since Hurricane María's landfall. Many communities in Puerto Rico still do not have electric power, and the island has long since fallen out of our daily news headlines. As we look back to the intensity of recovery efforts in the time since the initial impact, the pattern of a federal response lacking in urgency, especially when compared with concurrent recovery work in Texas and Florida, reveals some clues as to why Puerto Rico continues to suffer the results of María to this day.

In the first two weeks after the storm, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), approved \$6.2 million in funding for assistance to victims of Hurricane María, and 10,000 federal workers were on the ground in Puerto Rico.<sup>19</sup> At this point, FEMA had also provided 1.6 million meals, 2.8 million liters of water, and about 5,000 tarps to the island.<sup>20</sup> While these numbers may seem staggering, they pale in comparison to the

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<sup>15</sup> Meyer, R. (2017). What's happening with the relief effort in Puerto Rico? *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from: <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2017/10/what-happened-in-puerto-rico-a-timeline-of-hurricane-maria/541956/>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Gotay, B. T. (2018). Ayuda para la isla tras María fue inferior a otros territorios de EE. UU. *El Nuevo Día*. Retrieved from: <https://www.elnuevodia.com/noticias/locales/nota/ayudaparalaislatrasmariafueinferioraotrosteritoriosdeee-uu-2409397/>

<sup>18</sup> Robles, F., Davis K., and Almkhtar, S. (2017). Official toll in Puerto Rico: 64. Actual deaths may be 1,052. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/12/08/us/puerto-rico-hurricane-maria-death-toll.html>

<sup>19</sup> Vinik, D. (2018). How Trump favored Texas over Puerto Rico. *Politico*.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

Federal response after Hurricane Harvey struck Texas, just weeks before María tore through Puerto Rico. In the first two weeks after Hurricane Harvey, victims received \$141.8 million in assistance from FEMA, 30,000 federal workers were on the ground, and FEMA had distributed 5.1 million meals, 4.5 million liters of water, and more than 20,000 tarps to Houston alone.<sup>21</sup> FEMA approved permanent disaster work just 10 days after Hurricane Harvey in Texas, whereas the agency took 43 days to make the same approval for Puerto Rico following Hurricane María.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps more important than the volume of aid approved for Puerto Rico is the government's sluggish pace in reacting to the disaster. Nearly 1,000 beds reserved for FEMA emergency responders remained empty in Puerto Rico's Convention Center, two weeks after Hurricane María.<sup>23</sup>

Government officials argue that FEMA and other agencies worked as quickly and effectively as they were able to, and cite the "geographic, financial and political situations," in Puerto Rico as explanations for the comparatively slow and muted emergency response.<sup>24</sup> FEMA assistant administrator for field operations, Mike Byrne, defended his agency's response in Puerto Rico by saying, "We didn't have any deaths from starving on this. We didn't have any deaths from dehydration. We got plenty of water and food out to people."<sup>25</sup> Byrne's statements easily gloss over the months of suffering endured by islanders, especially in rural areas, and do not acknowledge that when compared with the same period of time in previous years clearly indicate that Puerto Rico experienced a notably higher mortality rate in 2017.<sup>26</sup>

While some might argue that excess deaths cannot be directly attributed to Hurricane María, many of them stem from the stagnation in the process of moving from the emergency phase of disaster response to the longer-term recovery phase. The emergency phase refers to the period of time in which people's most urgent needs, such as access to food, water, and electricity, are not being met. Once these basic necessities are fulfilled, the focus can then shift to the recovery phase, in which rebuilding of communities, government agencies, and infrastructure is carried out.<sup>27</sup> This first phase typically lasts days or weeks in the United States, but Puerto Rico is certainly an exception as many communities are still living in emergency, without access to basic necessities.<sup>28</sup> One month after the storm, about 1 million people did not have access to running water, and by the beginning of March, 2018, 10% of customers, or at least 156,000 people, were still without electricity.<sup>29</sup> It is also important to note that many of those who are counted amongst those who have power are not connected to the electric grid, but are actually relying on generators.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Vinik, D. (2018).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Sutter, J. D. (2018). We are the forgotten people: It's been almost six months since Hurricane Maria, and Puerto Ricans are still dying. *CNN*.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Sutter, J. D. (2018).

In early March in the town of Maunabo, on the southeast coast of Puerto Rico, a range of 35%- 50% of the 11,500 residents had electricity, but none were connected to the main grid.<sup>31</sup> The town's hospital was relocated to a municipal building, and its hours of service were slashed from 24-hour care to operating hours of 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. In January, 2018, one resident of Maunabo died of a heart attack in the hospital's parking lot around 5 a.m.-two hours before the emergency room would open for the day.<sup>32</sup> Those who rely on electricity to power their medical devices must also consider the costs of buying gasoline to power their generators, should they have access to them. One family reported paying about \$60 per week in hopes of keeping the generator running to power their father's breathing machine; in January, the generator ran out of gas, and he died shortly thereafter.<sup>33</sup> These are only two examples of the ongoing suffering in just one of many of the communities that were especially hard-hit by Hurricane María; across the island, living with limited access to electricity, water, food, and transportation have become components of "normal" life for many. While these deaths do not count towards the official toll of 64, they can be clearly attributed to María through a clear cause and effect relationship. It is because of cases such as these that many simply dismiss the government's official body count; it is because they know that the losses of human life are unlikely to ever be represented by the statistics alone.

Even as some of the metropolitan areas of the island appear to have progressed into the recovery phase, countless communities are simply adapting to the new status quo of living in constant emergency. One woman with whom I spoke has returned to Puerto Rico several times since María to visit her mother and sister, and told me that as late as April there were constant reminders of the storm in every part of the island. Even though she described the state of living as "business as usual," upon closer inspection, big empty gaps in grocery store shelves, gnarled trees, and missing storefront signs, give way to the anger and frustration that many Puerto Ricans feel as they realize there is still a long road to recovery ahead. She described a typical day of driving around and "doing normal stuff," like going to Walmart or a friend's house, which would always be punctuated by whoever she was with pointing at something outside of the car, and saying "that's from María."<sup>34</sup>

After speaking with this woman, it also became abundantly clear that one's opinion of the recovery efforts in Puerto Rico was somewhat dependent on their political stance. When I mentioned that I was interested in following Puerto Rican news coverage of the federal response to the storm, she kindly asked to borrow my pen and paper, and drew me a diagram of how each Puerto Rican media outlet was aligned politically, explaining that their perspectives would largely depend on this. In an attempt to capture the spectrum of reporting and how it is influenced by political beliefs, I examined how different news sources would report the same events or milestones of the recovery efforts. Ultimately, I

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Oral history interview, 11 April, 2018, 3:30pm.



found that a given outlet's political bias could often be deduced simply from their headlines alone.

In the table below, I selected two key events: President Trump's visit to Puerto Rico on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, and the headlines centering on the administration's ultimate decision to grant a temporary waiver of the Jones Act for Puerto Rico. On September 28<sup>th</sup>, the federal government granted a ten-day waiver of the Jones Act, meaning that the requirement that any emergency supplies being shipped from the mainland US must be carried on American-made and American-owned vessels was temporarily uplifted. While the effects of this temporary waiver are arguable, this did spark a debate in the federal legislature in mid-October over whether the law should be permanently repealed. Opponents of the law argue that it disproportionately affects US islands like Hawaii and Puerto Rico, by forcing the prices of goods to increase due to high shipping costs, while proponents argue that the law protects the domestic shipping industry.<sup>35</sup>

Event/Topic	Political Bias		
	Status-Quo	Pro-Statehood	Pro-Independence
<b>Trump visits Puerto Rico</b>	"Trump lanza papel toalla a damnificados por huracán María" - <i>El Vocero</i> , 3 October 2017	"Trump observa de primera mano los daños que dejó el huracán María" - <i>El Nuevo Día</i> , 3 October 2017	"Llegó Trump...mientras, estudiantes limpiaban la IUPI" - <i>Claridad</i> , 3 October 2017
<b>On Cabotage/Jones Act</b>	"Sanders ahora dispuesto a considerar eliminación de leyes de cabotaje" - <i>El Vocero</i> , 22 October 2017	"Se reactiva el debate por las leyes de cabotaje" - <i>El Nuevo Día</i> , 18 October 2018	"Respuesta proletaria a las posiciones burguesas sobre las leyes de cabotaje" - <i>Abayarde Rojo</i> , 20 October 2017

*Table 1.* Headlines reporting on two key events, President Trump's October 3<sup>rd</sup> visit to Puerto Rico, and the debate over repealing the Jones Act, from Puerto Rican media outlets show how political bias affects their reporting. The news outlets that are in favor of maintaining the status-quo or in favor of Puerto Rican statehood tend to be less critical of the United States government, while those in favor of Puerto Rican independence are much more critical of it. For example, the coverage of President Trump's visit by pro-statehood news outlet *El Nuevo Día* has a very clear positive focus on his decision to view the damage "first hand." In contrast, the pro-independence *Claridad* portrays the President's visit as inactive through the use of the verb "he arrived," in contrast to the much more active description of the local students who were "cleaning up" their campus. Similarly, in reporting on the debate over the Jones Act, *El Nuevo Día* has selected a headline that is fairly neutral, and simply notes that the debate over the Act has been reactivated, while pro-independence outlet *Abayarde Rojo* reports on the debate as the proletariat response to the bourgeoisie position on the Jones Act.

The inclusion of the attitudes and perspectives represented in Puerto Rican news media clearly show that in many ways the society is quite divided along political lines, and that the assessments of Hurricane María recovery efforts are no exception. While much of the

<sup>35</sup> Chokshi, N. (2017). Would repealing the Jones Act help Puerto Rico? *New York Times*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/24/us/jones-act-puerto-rico.html>

reporting was fairly similar in the “emergency” phase of recovery immediately after the storm, we see that within a few weeks, the focus shifted from sharing key information paramount to safety and survival to again ensuring that the information reported falls within the bounds of political acceptability for a given outlet.

While both of the people from Puerto Rico that I interviewed affirmed this conclusion, they also pointed to the fact that in spite of the news media returning to its old political affiliations, in the absence of a strong and sweeping government response to the storm, many towns and communities have been left no other option but to set aside their differences, and rebuild together. One told me that before María, a person’s stance towards politics would determine their status in society; their identities, and often even their jobs are built upon and dependent of their political attitudes. From his perspective, the fact that politics had, at least temporarily, ceased to dominate the discourse and actions on a community scale in many parts of Puerto Rico was in itself somewhat revolutionary. During one phone call, his father remarked that after years of living in the same neighborhood, he had finally gotten to meet his neighbors, as they worked together to clean up the mess left behind by María.<sup>36</sup>

### **Conclusion: Colonialism and second-class citizenry in the era of climate change**

When considered in isolation, the events surrounding the impact and recovery from Hurricane María in Puerto Rico are at the very least upsetting and frustrating. However, when viewed through the lens of Puerto Rico’s colonial status, and in the vacuum of climate change, this event becomes just one in a troubling line of actions clearly designating the Americans residing in territorial entities as second-class citizens, which is certain to continue into the future if no political changes are made. The federal government’s lackluster response to the disaster has forced many Puerto Ricans to turn to each other, often making community-based recovery the most effective and viable option for rural communities faced with few other options. In many ways, this establishment of a community-based organizational infrastructure is a positive outcome that has arisen from the devastation caused by María, but it alone cannot offer a long-term, large-scale path forward in terms of Puerto Rico’s future stability and sustainability.

In spite of the federal government’s repetitive assertion that the timing of their response is due to Puerto Rico’s “unique” geographic situation, experts on disaster response remarked on the important role played by congressmen and senators in advocating for their respective states after a natural disaster.<sup>37</sup> Without any real political power in the legislature, Puerto Rico’s ability to apply pressure and demand assistance is greatly diminished. Following Hurricane Harvey, the thirty-six congressional representatives, and two senators from Texas had the ability to call the attention of the federal government, and ensure that their needs were being met.<sup>38</sup> As an unincorporated territory, Puerto Rico is only allotted one nonvoting Congressional delegate- a flagrant power

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<sup>36</sup> Oral history interview, 11 April 2018, 11:00am.

<sup>37</sup> Vinik, D. (2018).

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

differential when compared with the representation granted to every incorporated US state.<sup>39</sup>

This lack of representation has played out in another disturbing way in the negotiations surrounding federal funding for permanent rebuilding projects. By the end of March, Texas had already received funding for permanent infrastructure repairs, while Puerto Rico had received none.<sup>40</sup> Perhaps more troubling is that Puerto Rico has “agreed” to become the first disaster zone that will only be allotted federal funds for rebuilding based on an experimental formula, which requires the island to cover any costs that exceed their initial budget.<sup>41</sup> This requirement does not exist for normal federal funding for permanent projects, and this is the first time that this formula will be used on a large scale. In Texas, FEMA will be paying any budget overages of federally funded reconstruction projects.<sup>42</sup> According to multiple officials, the reality is that White House officials pressured Puerto Rico’s local government into accepting these terms, and threatened to withhold all funding for permanent projects if they should refuse.<sup>43</sup>

The political arm-twisting exercised by the federal government is reminiscent of the long-ago perceived financial abuses of another colonial power, as it attempted to control the American colonies by means of excessive taxation. The young America that fought to escape from underneath the oppressive thumb of colonial rule, and whose rallying cry of “no taxation without representation,” is still repeated in history classrooms across the country to this day, seems to have matured into a nation which will not hesitate to hobble its own colonies with the same centuries-old tactic of financial manipulation. Without voting power or meaningful representation in national politics, neither Puerto Rico nor its citizens can be considered equal to their counterparts on the mainland, as proven by the inequality entrenched in the ongoing process of disaster recovery.

In the modern era, the futures of our social, political, and physical landscapes are compromised by the looming threat of climate change. As the air and seas warm, hurricanes will continue to strengthen more quickly, bring more rain, and will occur more frequently.<sup>44,45</sup> Of course, climate change will bring other impacts such as more frequent and extreme heat waves, an increase in exposure to disease, and threats to agriculture and fisheries, all of which will disproportionately impact marginalized people. As we have seen with the 2017 hurricane season, the aftermath of natural disasters has the ability to shed light on the inequality experienced by the American citizens of Puerto Rico, which

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<sup>39</sup> Vinik, D. (2018).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Samenow, J. (2018). Because of climate change, hurricanes are raining harder and may be growing stronger more quickly. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/capital-weather-gang/wp/2018/05/08/dueto-climate-change-hurricanes-are-raining-harder-and-may-be-growing-stronger-faster/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.37efdd72ee56](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/capital-weather-gang/wp/2018/05/08/dueto-climate-change-hurricanes-are-raining-harder-and-may-be-growing-stronger-faster/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.37efdd72ee56)

<sup>45</sup> Kossin et. al. (2014). The poleward migration of the location of tropical cyclone maximum intensity. *Nature*, vol. 509. DOI: 10.1038/nature13278

results from the island's colonial status. If the blatant disregard for Puerto Rico by the US continues, we will eventually be forced to reckon with the hypocrisy of a nation that prides itself as a constitutional democracy, but selectively denies the full set of foundational privileges and rights to some of its own citizens. At this point, the question is not *if* another disaster will strike Puerto Rico, but rather, *when* the next María arrives, how will the US respond? I fear that far too few lessons have been learned by the vast majority of mainland citizens and politicians, but find optimism in the resilience of the Puerto Rican people, as they continue to work together to forge ahead on the path to recovery.