In 1949, Puerto Rico celebrated the election of its first native governor. Conscious of its historic importance, this first government had not only to articulate Puerto Rico’s evolving relationship to the United States mainland but also to equip Puerto Rico for the impending necessity of urbanization and economic development. Angelo Pis-Dudot, TC ’17, shows how these two projects were always intertwined: as San Juan’s explosion economic opportunities drew migrants from around the island, U.S. investment never faded from the city’s successes.
In January 1949, fifty years after control of Puerto Rico changed hands from Spain to the United States, the island witnessed the inauguration of its first native governor. Celebrations and ceremonies marked the overwhelming electoral victory of Luis Muñoz Marín, the leader and founder of the Popular Democratic Party (PPD) who had enjoyed a decade of widespread support for his party’s populist politics and modernizing economic program. Although Muñoz’s inauguration preceded the 1952 constitutional reformulation of Puerto Rico’s political status that established the current Estado Libre Asociado (Free Associated State, or Commonwealth as it is more commonly known), the symbolic event shared the calendar year with another significant first in the island’s capital. In December 1949, over 400 guests from the mainland U.S., including movie stars and radio personalities, and prominent Puerto Ricans, including Governor Muñoz, descended on San Juan to inaugurate Puerto Rico’s first modern luxury hotel, the Hilton Caribe.1

The ostensibly patriotic celebration of a major milestone in Puerto Rico’s self-governance may seem to contrast somewhat with the establishment of an industry that catered to mostly high-end tourists and businesspeople from the mainland U.S. Yet both events were in fact complementary examples of two important and intertwined historical movements in mid-century Puerto Rico. The inauguration of Marin and the opening of the Hilton Caribe were linked by the island’s fundamentally colonial political and economic framework, which was easily susceptible to such internal contradictions. The 1940s witnessed Muñoz’s successful leadership of the PPD and his conversion on the perennial question of the island’s political status: originally an independista, Muñoz came to embrace the middle ground of autonomy as embodied in the Commonwealth constitution. And in the early 1940s, a massive effort to industrialize and modernize Puerto Rico began, with the island eventually adopting the development model of export promotion. In a July 1949 address to the U.S. House Committee on Public Lands, Governor Muñoz announced the end of a Puerto Rico whose economic situation many on the island and the continent saw as hopeless and the beginning of its industrial revolution: “In the last few years we have abandoned what we might call ‘Operation Lament’ and are now in the midst of ‘Operation Bootstrap’...We are trying to lift ourselves by our own bootstraps.”2

Operation Bootstrap, as it came to be known thereafter, was to be the engine for improved standards of living and government services for all Puerto Ricans. Yet despite the PPD’s populist roots, Operation Bootstrap came to embody a New Deal ethos of

bureaucratic government intervention and planning ultimately aimed at attracting foreign investment to Puerto Rico. Although PPD founder Muñoz presided over the island as governor from 1948 to 1964 and largely shaped the politics of Operation Bootstrap, it was Teodoro Moscoso, head of Fomento, the government agency principally responsible for Operation Bootstrap, who drove the official plan to reorient Puerto Rico’s economy from agriculture to export production of manufactured goods. And this fact is hardly surprising: Moscoso, a son of a well-to-do family in the southern city of Ponce, began his career in planning at the Ponce Housing Authority and rose to administrative prominence under the tutelage of Rexford Tugwell, a member of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s “Brain Trust” and the appointed governor of Puerto Rico from 1941 to 1946.

At the center of Operation Bootstrap, therefore, was a belief in the power of the insular government—through careful planning and in partnership with the U.S. government—to expand Puerto Rico’s economy and improve standards of living for all borinqueños.

The industrial jobs and nascent tourism industry created by Bootstrap drew waves of Puerto Ricans from economically depressed rural areas into the island’s cities, resulting in unprecedented levels of urbanization and new demands on the urban planning apparatus. This situation was especially true for the island’s capital, San Juan. While Ponce and Mayaguez were primary centers of cultural and economic activity in the early twentieth century, Operation Bootstrap propelled San Juan to primate city status: it was double the size of the island’s second-largest city, Ponce. Between 1940 and 1960, the population of metropolitan San Juan more than doubled, from roughly 300,000 to 647,979, accounting in 1960 for 28 percent of the island’s total population. The old fringes of the city sprawled into the interior of the island as the importation of automobile-centered planning met extensive construction of public and private housing developments, called urbanizaciones, which never quite kept up with demand. Along the coast, new luxury hotels like the Hilton Caribe and high-rise apartment buildings transformed the old colonial capital’s skyline and reframed San Juaneros’ relationship with visitors from the mainland.

This essay examines how Operation Bootstrap reshaped San Juan under the governorship of Luis Muñoz Marín from 1948 to 1964, focusing primarily on economic development, housing and transportation, and tourism. Various studies have explored the conflicts, progress, and inconsistencies generated by the island’s colonial relationship with the United States during this period, though few have specifically investigated the intersection between Operation Bootstrap’s practical and ideological aspects and the mid-

century urban changes in the island’s capital. Most obviously, Bootstrap and the larger modernization project of which it was a part attracted enterprise and capital to San Juan that stimulated the city’s economic and demographic growth and raised standards of living in the city and beyond, allowing the insular government to invest heavily in housing and other services for the urban poor. Yet San Juan’s dependence on foreign investment and the emigration of thousands of Puerto Ricans to the U.S. mainland, where growth and stability were to be found, revealed the paradoxes central to the city’s colonial status. While San Juan certainly modernized and grew to prominence in the mid-twentieth century under Puerto Rican leadership, planners were ultimately unable to control and provide for the demographic forces unleashed by a restructured economy in the context of its relationship with the United States.

THE PPD WEARS BOOTS: THE EMBRACE OF AUTONOMY AND OPERATION BOOTSTRAP

The Popular Democratic Party had its roots in the populism of Depression-era Puerto Rico. By the 1940s, over 80 percent of Puerto Rico’s external trade was with the United States. The collapse of the sugar industry during the Great Depression, in part due to the U.S.’s abrogation of favorable trade agreements with the island, devastated Puerto Rico’s economy and led to increased criticism of the colonial regime and to militant pro-independence politics. Muñoz sought to harness the new political winds to tackle these issues, founding the PPD in 1938 on a platform of agrarian reform and government intervention intended to reduce the island’s dependence on U.S. capital. In its 1940 electoral program, the PPD promised to break up agricultural holdings larger than 500 acres (the vast majority of which were sugar plantations); to establish new state-owned industries to reduce absentee control of the economy and boost employment; and to improve workers’ rights and conditions, guaranteeing a minimum wage in the process. Muñoz’s platform and American-style campaign, which effectively utilized radio and other campaign tactics, helped the PPD sweep the 1940 elections and won him the presidency of the Puerto Rican senate.

The PPD did not go so far as to fully endorse Puerto Rican independence, however, and in fact sought to maintain a coalition that included moderate-to-conservative

5 See, for instance, Ayala and Bernabe’s Puerto Rico in the American Century or A.W. Maldonado’s Teodoro Moscoso and Operation Bootstrap.
7 Ibid., 4.
8 Ayala and Bernabe, Puerto Rico in the American Century, 182.
elements focused primarily on economic development. Three ideological factions formed within the Populares on the question of Puerto Rico’s political status. The first faction considered the idea of a “no status” policy as a tactical move that would allow Muñoz to gain the necessary power before pushing for independence; the second recognized real economic impediments before the shift to independence could be made; and the third was primarily interested in economic development and social reform. Teodoro Moscoso fell into the last group and was no particular fan of independence, preferring autonomy or statehood, which he saw as the only options that would ensure the economic prospects necessary for industrializing Puerto Rico and modernizing its economy.9

In helping establish the Puerto Rican Development Company (Pridco) in 1942, Moscoso reoriented the PPD’s priorities around industrializing the country. Reflecting on its importance to the trajectory of the PPD decades later, Moscoso stated that “In 1942 the [PPD] platform didn’t have one word in it about industrialization so we decided to do something about it.”10 Under the direction of Governor Tugwell and with the assistance of several attorney friends, Moscoso drew heavily upon the plans that established Chile’s Corporación de Fomento de la Producción to draft the proposed legislation for Pridco’s creation. Throughout the 1940s, Pridco was responsible for creating various state-run enterprises in light manufacturing that were aimed at diversifying Puerto Rico’s economy and making it more self-sufficient. The Pridco enterprises struggled to find a market on the island, however, due to private economic interests that opposed expansions of government planning and intervention in the market. Private enterprises refused to buy goods produced in Pridco factories such as glass bottles for the rum industry, paper for newspapers, or cardboard.11 The PPD was ultimately reluctant to directly challenge the interests opposed to expanding government economic planning. As a result, manufacturing as a share of the island’s national income barely budged from 11.8 percent in 1940 to 13.6 percent in 1949.12

Puerto Rico’s stalled economic takeoff took place amidst a wave of global decolonization following World War II, which pushed Muñoz to reconsider his stance on economic development models and their relation to the question of the island’s political status. The congressional independence hearings for the Philippines—another colony taken from Spain as part of the spoils of the Spanish-American War—were the decisive turning point in Muñoz’s political thought. As he explained years later, the independence hearings “convinced me that Puerto Rico would never obtain the right to choose separate independence in a plebiscite except under economic conditions which would be disastrous to the

9 Maldonado, Teodoro Moscoso, 16–17.
11 Ayala and Bernabe, Puerto Rico in the American Century, 184.
12 Ibid., 189.
welfare of the people of Puerto Rico and which would destroy any hope of continuing to improve the standard of living.”

By 1947, the PPD and Muñoz thus abandoned the goal of political independence and instead prioritized the development and modernization of Puerto Rico within the existing colonial framework. Rather than developing insular markets for domestically manufactured goods and diversifying the agricultural sector, Operation Bootstrap turned to export production and attracting foreign—mainly U.S.—investment in manufacturing and other capitalist enterprises. In 1950, Pridco merged into the newly established Economic Development Administration, popularly known as Fomento, which was tasked with heading Operation Bootstrap and given access to Puerto Rico’s General Fund for financing. Fomento’s primary tool for attracting investment was a full tax exemption for whichever operations U.S. enterprises wished to open on the island, a measure passed by Puerto Rico’s legislature in 1948 after a contentious amendment process. The insular government repeatedly extended the deadline on tax exemptions through the 1950s and 1960s, sometimes using a tax exemption as an incentive to encourage corporations to locate their enterprises outside of major metropolitan areas, especially San Juan. Coupled with lower labor costs on the island due to wages below the U.S. federal minimum, the tax exemption strategy was largely successful in attracting investment and generated significant improvements in the material standard of living—wages increased; public utilities improved; and educational, health, and housing services expanded throughout the 1950s. Yet Puerto Rico’s economy was nevertheless characterized by weak internal connections and an almost exclusive reliance on U.S. capital and consumer markets. The scholar Eduardo Seda Bonilla has criticized Bootstrap for having failed to make Puerto Ricans more entrepreneurially autonomous, writing that “the purchasing power that [was] generated in the Puerto Rican population [was] not converted into entrepreneurial potential, for, to begin with, the competition with subsidiaries of giant U.S. companies [turned] out to be nearly impossible.” While touted as a success in modernization and industrialization, Bootstrap thus seemed to suffer from an economic absenteeism—with foreign proprietors owning large portions of Puerto Rico’s economic holdings—that was present in the island’s history as a monocrop economy. Indeed, by 1974, 70 percent of all productive wealth in

13 Maldonado, Teodoro Moscoso, 55.
14 Ibid., 189.
15 Magruder, Son of Bootstrap, 3. Interview with Moscoso.
16 Maldonado, Teodoro Moscoso, 57.
17 Ayala and Bernabe, Puerto Rico in the American Century, 190.
18 Ibid., 200.
19 Ibid.
Puerto Rico was owned by non-insular investors. The ideological shifts needed to justify the PPD’s total rejection of Puerto Rican independence and embrace of foreign investment in Puerto Rico’s economy hinged on discourses of democratic self-governance in the context of Cold War geopolitics and modernization theory. Staking a middle ground between calls for statehood and independence, Muñoz argued against nationalism of all sorts in a series of lectures delivered at Harvard in 1959. “In Puerto Rico,” he asserted, “we are not Puerto Rican nationalists and have not become American nationalists. We are loyal, non-nationalist citizens of the United States.” Nationalism, following the upheavals caused by socialist and fascist nationalist movements in WWII and the Cuban Revolution, was a dangerous form of politics to be avoided just as much as colonialism. According to Muñoz, “to overcome the obviously obsolescent colonialism... Puerto Rico did not embrace the darkly hidden obsolescence of nationalism. Puerto Ricans are anti-colonialists and still not nationalists—a fact unique and of some illumination.” Puerto Rico’s constitutional status under the Commonwealth provided self-governance without nationhood, which was in Muñoz’s eyes “an experiment in non-nationalistic political freedom for a Latin American people.” Operation Bootstrap’s dependence on U.S. investment and market access thus found part of its political justification in an ambiguous, paradoxical conception of Puerto Rican national identity.

GROWING PAINS: HOUSING AND TRANSPORTATION IN SAN JUAN

As Operation Bootstrap attracted more investment to Puerto Rico, San Juan underwent a rapid transformation and achieved preeminence among the island’s cities. Most new industrial ventures were established in the city and in nearby towns such as Bayamón, Guaynabo, and Carolina, all of which became integrated into the San Juan metropolitan area as the city expanded. From 1950 to 1960, the greater San Juan region “accounted for almost half of the island’s net income and for nearly three of every four nonagricultural jobs created in Puerto Rico.” The capital’s economic growth exercised a magnetic pull on rural migrants who sought prospects better than the 80-cent minimum wage in the agricultural sector — where even jobs were not guaranteed, as the agricultu-

23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
26 Ibid., 21. The figure reflects the minimum wage rate from 1969.
tural and home-needlework sectors that had dominated the countryside’s economy had almost entirely collapsed by the late 1940s. In fact, as early as the period between 1935 and 1940, San Juan drew over half of Puerto Rico’s interregional migrants. During this time, the economic heart of San Juan shifted out of the old colonial city on the San Juan islet and into the nearby, more recently populated district of Santurce – a symbolic move that highlighted the pressure exerted on the city’s existing infrastructure.

The thousands of internal migrants that moved to San Juan helped drive the city’s rapid development through a massive demand for residential construction, both informal and formal, public and private. Despite large advances in living standards, estimates in 1969 suggested the existence of 421 shantytowns in Puerto Rico with a total of 79,382 dwellings. The residents of San Juan’s shantytowns were primarily rural migrants who found employment as unskilled laborers in other commercial and industrial sectors of the city. Though the municipal and insular officials sometimes accommodated the informal structures, as a general rule planners strove to eliminate shantytowns and relocate residents to public housing projects as part of an ambitious urban renewal campaign. During a comprehensive urban renewal project in Old San Juan, for example, planners proposed razing the La Perla shantytown that had developed beyond the colonial city’s walls as part of an effort to clear “blight” and make way for a large park on the shores of the San Juan islet.

The widespread construction of urbanizaciones, or housing developments, throughout San Juan at once embodied unplanned, sprawling development and a governmental commitment to a vision of a Puerto Rican welfare state. Urbanizaciones could either be privately owned and developed or publicly subsidized, mostly in the form of housing cooperatives. Tens of thousands of San Juaneros—many of whom moved or were relocated from shantytowns—benefitted from low to no-cost units with modern appliances and utilities that could withstand tropical storms and hurricanes. Yet many cultural critics and planners criticized the developments for poor planning and design. Law professor Federico Cordero criticized the urbanizaciones, claiming that many “lacked aesthetic appeal” and “added to the general impression that the urbanizations had been built on an assembly line.” Seda Bonilla inveighed against the planning of the urban-
izaciones for their widespread use of English place-names such as “Sabana Gardens,” “Royal Palm,” “Hyde Park,” and “Bayamón Gardens,” a phenomenon he dubbed the “genocide of Puerto Rican place-naming.”34 Perhaps more concerning was the economic segregation that resulted from uniform price-points within the urbanizaciones. Understanding socioeconomically segregated urbanizaciones as an impediment to collective advancement, a 1963 study for the renovation of the Llorens Torres public housing project stated among its objectives the creation of “a community possessing a much higher degree of socio-economic integration with the immediately surrounding areas as well as with the embracing [sic] larger community—the San Juan Metropolitan Area—of which it constitutes an important part.”35 Governor Muñoz’s 1963 address to the Puerto Rican legislature, which emphasized the plan’s intent to “minimize the institutional character of the [Llorens Torres] project while producing a more heterogeneous community—socially as well as economically,” demonstrated the insular government’s commitment to harnessing the economic productivity generated by Operation Bootstrap for the public welfare.36

Mass migration to the United States provided a pressure valve for an insular government committed to providing newcomers essential government services as rural Puerto Ricans continued to trickle into San Juan. Nevertheless, planners struggled to keep up with the rate of the city’s demographic and topographic growth. According to a report from Ramón García Santiago, President of the Puerto Rico Planning Board, the metropolitan area expanded threefold from 1940 to 1960, a rate of spatial growth that outpaced population growth—in other words, the development of urban sprawl.37 A transportation study commissioned in 1967 by the Puerto Rican Planning Board faulted the urbanizations, “which [were] built in ‘leap frog’ fashion, leaving large pockets of underdeveloped land,” for the city’s sprawl.38 In the study’s estimation, “the San Juan Metropolitan Area grew without strong guidance or direction of land-use control” over the previous two decades.39 Its recommendations—proposals for a multi-center model of

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35 Puerto Rico Urban Renewal and Housing Administration, “A Plan for the Transformation of Llorens Torres Public Housing Project in San Juan, Puerto Rico. An Endeavor…to Improve its Community Living,” San Juan: 1963. 24. The Llorens Torres urbanización, built between 1950 and 1954 and home to 15,000 residents, was the largest public housing project in San Juan.
36 Ibid., 3.
38 Wilbur Smith and Associates, “San Juan Metropolitan Area Transportation Study; Transportation Plan,” Prepared for Department of Public Works, Puerto Rico Planning Board, San Juan: 1967. 5. See figure 1, attached. The firm’s founder, Wilbur M. Smith, was a pioneer in major transportation system design and construction across the world and designed large parts of the interstate highway system.
39 Ibid., 3.
urban concentration and vast expansions in highway and expressway construction—presumed that inhabitants of San Juan owned vehicles. It certainly seemed that way to the study’s authors, consultants from a major transportation design and construction firm with a potential stake in expanding the highway system. From 1950 to 1960, private motor vehicle registration increased by 342 percent to a total of 106,903 vehicles, vastly outpacing population growth in the city—an upward trajectory that showed no signs of slowing by the time of the study’s drafting. By the mid-70s, that number had jumped to 800,000, a development that prompted Teodoro Moscoso to remark, “Now that I’m not so sure is progress.” Seda Bonilla shared Moscoso’s doubts: he attributed the encroachment of highways and housing into the countryside and the destruction of fertile agricultural lands to the lack of any serious planning efforts aimed at promoting pedestrian or bicycle transportation.

CARIBBEAN HOSPITALITY: TOURISM AND MODERNITY IN SAN JUAN

Parallel to the promotion of industrialization was the insular government’s development of the tourism industry, a symbolically charged component of Operation Bootstrap’s attempt to stimulate Puerto Rico’s economy and modernize its image. Conservative voices in Puerto Rico had for decades attempted to promote tourism and establish it as a key industry, but it was not until Moscoso became directly involved with the establishment of the Hilton Caribe that the industry took off and became an iconic and enduring part of San Juan’s cultural and economic landscape. Initially advanced under the pretext of providing accommodations for the foreign officials and businesspeople central to Operation Bootstrap, the tourism industry embodied major debates over modernization and cultural heritage, as well as the contours of the island’s colonial relationship with the United States, in the walls of its hotels.

Although the state quickly became one of the main investors in promoting the tourism sector, various officials of the insular government publicly voiced misgivings about expanding tourism, and in some cases vehemently denounced what many saw as a precarious cultural development. Indeed, a skeptical official attitude toward tourism was what had stalled its establishment until the late 1940s in the first place. Even in 1960, Durand Manzanal, Moscoso’s successor at Fomento, warned of tourism’s corrupt-

40 Ibid., 8.
41 Magruder, *Son of Bootstrap*, 7.
ing influence on the Puerto Rican body politic, writing, “The development of tourism should not result in the destruction of spiritual values.” Muñoz shared those concerns, suggesting in 1954 that tourist facilities be cordoned off into park areas similar to today’s isolated all-inclusive resorts to minimize the industry’s interaction with Puerto Ricans. Though tourism parks never came to pass, the governor’s attitude frustrated Moscoso, who claimed that Fomento was “never able to obtain from Muñoz the necessary directives as to how tourism was going to be developed.” Indeed, when asked if he had any regrets about Bootstrap, Moscoso cited what he considered to be tourism’s unruly growth, partly blaming Muñoz: “I regret very deeply that we didn’t plan the orderly development of tourism any better than we did…We really worked out a good tourism plan and gave it to Muñoz. Unfortunately, however, nothing ever happened with it.”

Nevertheless, Moscoso had a direct hand in catalyzing tourism’s takeoff under Operation Bootstrap and saw it as a “major link in the program for industrial development for the island.” In 1946, Moscoso reached out to various major hotel chains in the U.S. proposing that they consider opening ventures in Puerto Rico. Only Conrad Hilton responded, and within a year Moscoso had pushed the plans for the Hilton Caribe past opposition from the liberal wing of the PPD and from Rexford Tugwell, who was in his last year as governor. By the end, the Commonwealth government had invested $7.4 million into the Hilton Caribe. A weeklong celebration showcasing Operation Bootstrap surrounded the grand opening of the hotel, demonstrating its importance for Bootstrap’s economic program and public relations campaign. In 1948, after persuading Muñoz to back the measure, Moscoso successfully lobbied the Puerto Rican legislature to declare tourism an industry, thereby extending Bootstrap’s tax exemptions to investments in hotels. Soon thereafter, he upped the ante in convincing the insular legislature to approve gambling in hotels, albeit under very strict regulation and only after having sustained withering personal criticism from PPD politicians and planners.

While officials claim that the development of a tourist industry aimed to accommodate visitors with a wide range of socioeconomic statuses, in reality the Puerto Rican tourism industry largely followed the price-points set by the Hilton Caribe and, later, the

44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
46 Maldonado, Teodoro Moscoso, 120.
47 Magruder, Son of Bootstrap, 6. Interview with Magruder.
48 Ibid.
49 Maldonado, Teodoro Moscoso, 122–123.
52 Maldonado, Teodoro Moscoso, 127.
La Concha hotel. Geopolitical shifts in the Caribbean in the 1950s, namely the Cuban Revolution, allowed Puerto Rico to attract the U.S. tourist market and boost its annual visitors to 500,000 by the mid-1960s, thereby making it the most visited island in the Caribbean. From 1958 to 1964, between fifty and sixty percent of tourists visiting Puerto Rican hotels had an annual income over $10,000 while just twenty percent of U.S. citizens fell into that income bracket in the 1963 fiscal year. Sam Schweitzer, an American-born Puerto Rican businessman appointed by Muñoz to represent western Puerto Rico on a nine-person tourism planning committee, saw the homogeneity in the island’s hotels as a challenge for the industry. “What we need is three types of facilities,” he explained to the editor of a major Puerto Rican business tabloid. “[We need] luxury, middle priced and low priced for all people to be able to come here.” Though it is possible Moscoso may have intended to achieve this, the result at any rate was that prime coastal real estate in San Juan became dedicated to hosting and catering to well-heeled Americans travelling for business or vacation.

The construction of another iconic San Juan hotel, La Concha, further highlighted the tensions at the center of Operation Bootstrap and their manifestations in San Juan’s architectural landscape. As with the Hilton, Fomento oversaw the planning and construction of La Concha, which opened its doors as a luxury hotel in the high-end district of Condado in 1958. In the bidding process for the design of La Concha, all three local architecture firms employed modernism, whereas the mainland firms submitted Spanish Revivalist styles to the Fomento board. The Spanish Revivalist style was an elaboration of the California Mission style and others reminiscent of Spain’s Golden Age—none of which were rooted in Puerto Rican culture. As Hertz argues, its implementation throughout Puerto Rico, notably on the University of Puerto Rico’s Río Piedras campus, had the visual effect of preserving the island as an essentially non-North American, Hispanic sphere of U.S. influence. Fomento rejected that tradition, ultimately selecting the submission of local firm of Osvaldo Toro and Miguel Ferrer, which was established not long

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54 Mings, “Puerto Rico and Tourism,” 19. Tourist statistics were taken from Mings’ article, while income calculations are the author’s own and are based on federal census statistics from the 1964 Consumer Income report prepared by the Bureau of the Census of the U.S. Department of Commerce.
55 Magruder, *Son of Bootstrap*, 58.
57 Hertz, “The Struggle with Modernity,” 221.
before the competition to design La Concha was held and was also responsible for the design of the Hilton Caribe.

In their design for La Concha, Toro and Ferrer adapted modernist principles such as functionality to Puerto Rico’s local conditions and aesthetics, emphasizing features like cross ventilation and natural illumination through the manipulation of screens, shades, and *brise-soleils*. Simple though striking ornamental flourishes, such as the undulating roof structure atop La Concha’s nightclub, referenced local tropical flora and the omnipresence of water on the island. Hertz points out that, internally, the hotel was “organized around a central interior patio, a space in the La Concha [sic] called the ‘Batey,’ which is the name of the traditional indigenous public space around which the structures of the island’s pre-Columbian pueblos were organized.” The central patio may have also referenced the contemporary urban housing motif of a central internal patio, further grounding the hotel’s spatial arrangements in local practice and knowledge and establishing an architectural style that synthesized forward-looking, utopian forms with distinctly Puerto Rican innovations. La Concha’s modernist style, rooted in local traditions and references, mirrored and magnified the political project of the PPD, which sought a Puerto Rican “third way” of developing and modernizing the island. The tropical-modernist forms used in La Concha, however, contradict their purpose insofar as the local authenticity and cultural autonomy of the building were subverted by its function as a luxury hotel for foreigners, mainly from the U.S. mainland. La Concha was thus indicative of the wider paradox at the heart of Operation Bootstrap and the political project behind the *Estado Libre Asociado*. At the same time as planners sought a modern and autonomous Puerto Rico, they nevertheless continued to operate under a colonial framework.

**CONCLUSION: FREE ASSOCIATED DEPENDENCE?**

As Operation Bootstrap focused its promotional efforts in the U.S. mainland and had its ultimate shape determined by Puerto Rico’s government and the island’s colonial relationship with the U.S., San Juan was the main setting for the project of modernizing and industrializing Puerto Rico beginning in the 1940s and continues to be so to this day. Notwithstanding the limited autonomy conferred by Commonwealth status, the Muñoz administration’s policies were the first enacted by a top-to-bottom insular government composed of Puerto Ricans; they aimed to raise standards of living on the island and transform its international image from one of helplessness and dependence to one of industry and self-reliance. In the process, San Juan became the showcase example of

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58 Ibid, 222.
59 Ibid, 223.
the PPD’s project to define a new, modern path for Puerto Rico that balanced economic expediency against self-governance. The architectural design of the La Concha hotel was a testament to that project, cementing its place in the Condado skyline.

Along the way, planners at the municipal and insular levels responded to unforeseen pressures on San Juan’s infrastructure unleashed by Bootstrap while striving to construct and maintain the city’s modern image. That meant a determined project of shantytown clearance and urban renewal that forcibly relocated thousands of newly arrived San Juaneros and denied them the status linked to home ownership. It also meant an equally determined effort to provide not only quantitatively sufficient housing to the city’s poor and newly arrived residents, but also design and planning qualitatively suited to better integrate them into the larger city community. Both stances reflected a characteristically New Deal belief in social science and a commitment to a planning adapted to the island’s needs.

Less rosy, and perhaps less obvious, was Bootstrap’s legacy of dependence on foreign investment. In using tax exemptions to attract enterprises that created thousands of jobs in San Juan, Bootstrap left San Juaneros wide open to competition from foreign labor markets and the whims of U.S. corporations. As wages on the island increased and other emerging sectors began to industrialize, the manufacturing jobs that had attracted so many Puerto Ricans from the countryside began to disappear. Moreover, the fundamental economic model settled on by Bootstrap was never quite able to provide enough jobs. Unemployment rates on the island were persistently higher than in the U.S., pushing hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans in mid-century and beyond to leave the island for better economic prospects on the mainland. Though much of the tax exemption extended to companies by Bootstrap is no longer in place, U.S. multinationals on the island, on average, currently repatriate over forty percent of their earnings to the mainland U.S.60 Puerto Rico’s pharmaceutical industry, which produces a quarter of the island’s GDP today, follows the model of export promotion established by Operation Bootstrap in mid-century.

Economic dependence on the U.S. was thus ultimately at the heart of Operation Bootstrap and Muñoz’s decision to pursue Commonwealth status, and was the main factor contradicting the progress achieved in industrializing and modernizing Puerto Rico and especially San Juan. Although the city provided jobs and homes to hundreds of thousands of Puerto Ricans leaving a countryside devoid of economic prospects, it was unable to accommodate all of them – even as it strove to accommodate visitors from the U.S.

APPENDIX A

Originally produced in Hertz, “The Struggle with Modernity.”

3. Caribe Hilton Hotel. Courtesy of the Archivo de Arquitectur
APPENDIX B

Originally produced in Hertz, “The Struggle with Modernity.”

4. La Concha Hotel. Courtesy of the Archivo de Arquitectura y Construcción de la Universidad de Puerto Rico.
MODERNIZING THE COLONIAL CITY

BIBLIOGRAPHY


**TITLE IMAGE**