

arcia-Muñiz, "Geopolitics and Geohistory..."

a dis G.C.M.G.G.B.E., C.B.
 the P
 thei President:
 Eric Williams
 prec Caribbean Commission, Kent House,
 mo/o Port-of-Spain

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
 OF
 TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

British West Indies

Hon. Secretary & Treasurer:
 Mr. E. Johnson,

November 8, 1951

P. O. Box 102,
 Port-of-Spain

PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL

His Excellency Governor Muñoz Marín
 La Fortaleza
 Puerto Rico

Dear Governor Marín

I am taking the liberty of writing to you, not so much as Governor of Puerto Rico, but as the Caribbean's premier statesman-in-fact, apart from Norman Manley, the Caribbean's only statesman - about a matter in which your opinion will be decisive.

In May 1948, on the occasion of the Commission meeting in Puerto Rico which, as you may recall, Mr. Manley attended, the authorities of the University of Puerto Rico invited me to give my views of the research which was needed in the area. When I was finished, I was told that every suggestion I had made was being implemented in Puerto Rico for Puerto Rico, and I was invited to join the University to conduct similar work on a Caribbean scale. I felt compelled at the time to decline the invitation because my appointment as Deputy Chairman of the Research Council was then being fought out in a bitter struggle between the Caribbean and metropolitan representatives on the Commission, Mr. Manley receiving able and vigorous assistance from Governor Piñero and Dr. Picó.

The fight was resumed at the Guadeloupe Conference at the end of the year. With the odds in favour of the metropolitan representatives, Dr. Picó asked me to develop a proposal I had once made for a conference in Puerto Rico of distinguished scholars of the Caribbean area. When I had finished, he also asked me to come to Puerto Rico to undertake that assignment, in the event that my appointment with the Commission was rejected. As the Commission continued my acting appointment, however, that necessity did not arise.

Now, as you know, the Commission has decided to appoint as Secretary General a businessman who is not a native of the area, who is unacquainted with it, and who lacks all educational and professional qualifications for the post. I regard his appointment as an insult to all qualified West Indians and to the two senior officers in the present staff - one of whom, myself, was not a candidate for the post

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imposed, extraneous, metropolitan movement against local opposition. It is Puerto Rico's history which explains that remarkable identification of people with government which is so striking a contrast with the situation in the European territories. Puerto Rico's achievements and progress, vital in themselves and to Puerto Rico, must increasingly be seen in Puerto Rico against the sombre background of the backwardness - economic but, above all, spiritual and intellectual - of its neighbours. The proposed Institute of Caribbean Affairs is designed to provide for Puerto Rico this intellectual leadership, within and outside the area. As director of the Institute, I would be the link between Puerto Rico and the non United States territories.

As you perhaps know, Governor, I am on leave of absence with the Commission from Howard University in Washington, where I am Professor of Social and Political Science. But I feel that, in the modern world and especially in the Caribbean, the man of letters must be in the closest touch with people and their aspirations and demands. The research programme in which I am interested would be out of place in Washington, unless I were to regard it as the means of carving out an academic career for myself, which I do not. I feel that any research programme for the area must consciously be oriented towards the development of the Caribbean people, economic and, therefore, intellectual also, but always with the practical goal in mind. Accordingly I do not wish to return to Howard, and Mr. Manley, for whose opinions I have the highest respect, is equally against it. Nor do I just wish "a job" in Puerto Rico. If I did, I would not waste your valuable time. I am anxious to undertake a programme which, whilst, from the intellectual standpoint, not unbecoming the University of Puerto Rico, is consciously motivated by the desire to provide the knowledge and data necessary for statesmen and planners all over the Caribbean, with a view to laying the basis for and facilitating Caribbean cooperation. Before making any direct approach to the proper authorities, I thought it best to write to you to request your opinion of the extent to which my ideas harmonise, or can be made to harmonise, with the objectives and goals you have formulated and towards the realization of which such progress has already been made.

To a letter of this nature I do not think it necessary to attach the usual curriculum vitae. I do, however, take the opportunity to enclose a copy of my recent study on education in the British West Indies, which will indicate to you why Mr. Manley and I feel that there is no chance of the programme being undertaken in Jamaica. I would hope to continue in Puerto Rico all my present activities in the field of Caribbean history, especially my history of the Caribbean, 1492-1940, on which I am now engaged. I think it necessary to add only that I am a resident alien of the United States, and that I have not lost the privileges to which that status entitles me by my stay in Trinidad.

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but fully supported the other's claims. The appointment is so flagrant a disregard of all that the Commission has said that it stands for that the Puerto Rican representatives on the Commission have indicated their intention to resign. As one of these representatives is your predecessor in the office of Governor, and the other is one of your most able lieutenants, I regard their decision as one involving not only individuals but also the Government and People of Puerto Rico.

This fact, coupled with my personal reaction to the appointment and my disappointment with the organization which I have served for nearly nine years, convinces me that the time has come for me to resign, and satisfies me that the Commission, as at present organized, can never accomplish anything.

Two years ago I discussed fully with Mr. Manley the entire question of my accepting the invitation from the University of Puerto Rico. I indicated to him that I was particularly interested in a programme of research on colonial problems with special emphasis on the Caribbean, but giving attention to the Far East, and operating through an Institute of Colonial Affairs, which would publish a quarterly journal and which would maintain contact with the universities in India, Hawaii, Ceylon, the Philippines, etc. Mr. Manley, whilst stating, with a certain degree of wistfulness, that he would like to see me undertake this programme, with which he was completely in accord, at the University College of the West Indies in Jamaica, admitted that there was no prospect of that University having that degree of freedom and initiative which would allow it to adopt the programme, and advised me to go to Puerto Rico and bring such weight as I have to bear "at the strongest point in the Caribbean". He stressed the congenial atmosphere of Puerto Rico, the respect for freedom of inquiry, and the appreciation of the significance of "pure research" for concrete programmes of action.

I do not know to what extent the proposed Institute, specialising in colonial relationships, would accord with your Government's plans. But I do feel that, at the very least, there should be, in Puerto Rico, an Institute of Caribbean Affairs, which would undertake all the research, including the historical, which the Caribbean Commission should, but clearly will not, do. As the Social Science Research Centre of the University concentrates on Puerto Rico, so the proposed Institute will emphasise the place of Puerto Rico in the Caribbean and the importance of the Caribbean to Puerto Rico.

A governing principle of my life has always been that complete self-government is the first prerequisite to the unleashing of the dammed-up energies, productive and spiritual, of the people of the European territories. I believe that in the developments which, notwithstanding the Commission, inevitably lie ahead, nothing is to be expected of the metropolitan governments concerned, and that Puerto Rico must consciously assume, as, if you will pardon me, Governor, it does not now do, the leadership of the regional movement. This is not difficult. All Puerto Rico's history leads inescapably to that conclusion. Let me give only one example. The abolition of slavery in Puerto Rico was a spontaneous, local, Puerto Rican movement against metropolitan opposition; in the European territories, on the other hand, it was an

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I should appreciate an early and confidential opinion from you as to the course of action I am contemplating, so that I may take the necessary steps to terminate my connection with the Commission.

Please accept, Governor, my apologies for this long letter, and warmest personal regards.

Yours respectfully

(Signed) Eric Williams
Eric Williams