Any observer of Puerto Rican politics by the end of the 1940's could have concluded that the relationship between Luis Muñoz Marín, governor of Puerto Rico since 1948, and Vito Marcantonio, Congressman for El Barrio, was always an acrimonious one, that they had always been ferocious political enemies. Muñoz Marín publicly called Marcantonio a “communist” during the 1949 New York’s Mayoral election. On the other hand, Marcantonio by that time called Muñoz Marín “the Nero of Fortaleza,” characterized the political reforms leading to the Commonwealth in 1952 as the continuation of colonialism, and used to call the Popular Democratic Party’s economic reforms as “Operation Booby-trap” (in reference to its English name, Operation Bootstrap). But years before their relationship had not been so conflictive. From 1936 to 1945 the relationship between the two political leaders was one of political cooperation, even of joint political action and shared ideals. This presentation will elaborate on how their relationship began and why did it end the way it did.

To study the relationship between Marcantonio and Muñoz Marín is not merely of historical interest. Both political leaders represent political forces and processes very important for politics in Puerto Rico and the United States. Muñoz Marín represents a reformist and “populist” political process in Puerto Rico during the 1930's and 1940's, and the transition from a colonialism in crisis to the economic and political reforms of the postwar period. Marcantonio represents the last radical in Congress and reflects clearly the transition from the 1930's New Deal politics to the rising conservatism of the Cold War period in the United States. Marcantonio is linked to Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans as the representative of El Barrio in New York City. To study the relationship between the two leaders allows us to better understand the political process in Puerto Rico during this period and how certain political forces in Puerto Rico are related to those in the United States. On the other hand, it allows us to understand how the politics of the Puerto Rican community in New York is linked to politics in Puerto Rico. By this time it is clear that politics in Puerto Rico, including the government’s public policies like migration, was linked
to the affairs of the Puerto Rican community in the United States. It is precisely the issue of migration and Marcantonio’s relationship to the Puerto Rican community in New York City that will lead to the public struggle between the Governor of Puerto Rico and the Congressman from El Barrio in the late 1940's.