This book provides an updated overview of some of the most salient subjects and themes about the Puerto Rican population in the United States at present. It highlights the continued mobility and expansion of the Puerto Rican population throughout the country, including state-to-state migration, migration from Puerto Rico in light of the economic crisis in the island, as well as the role of service in the armed forces in anchoring new areas of settlement.

State of Puerto Ricans, 2017 reports on some persistent issues of concern, such as education, disconnected youth, political and civic engagement. But, in addition, it presents current information on some understudied subjects, such as access to healthcare, racial disparities, food insecurity and entrepreneurship.

State of Puerto Ricans, 2017 documents the continued perseverance and endurance of the vast majority of Puerto Ricans, who now reside in the United States.

Edited by Edwin Meléndez and Carlos Vargas-Ramos
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Puerto Rico is in crisis. What seemed like a periodic economic downturn, subject to the regular business cycle at the turn of the new century, in effect was the beginning of a cycle of stagnation that the island had not experienced since the Oil Shocks of the mid-1970s or since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The crisis in Puerto Rico began by all accounts in 2006, two years prior to the start of the Great Recession in the United States and coinciding with the end of Section 936 of the U.S. Code that granted federal tax exemption to multinational corporations operating in Puerto Rico. This time, borrowing to cover increasing fiscal deficits only led to more severe austerity. And with austerity—the cuts to schools, public safety, health services, and the social safety net—the island entered into a protracted humanitarian crisis. The Great Recession deepened the economic crisis in Puerto Rico and had direct consequences for stateside Puerto Ricans as well. All Puerto Ricans are enduring the consequences of the economic crisis in Puerto Rico whether they reside in the island or stateside.

Fueled by the collapse of the Puerto Rican economy and the inability of the political establishment to stabilize the fiscal crisis and turn around the economy, an unprecedented wave of migration from Puerto Rico to the United States gained momentum. The millennial migration rivals the magnitude of what is known in the literature as the Great Migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States during the 1950s. Accordingly, the Puerto Rican population in the U.S. grew from 3.8 million in 2005 to 5.3 million in 2015—a 40 percent population increase in a span of a decade. During the same period, the island lost 10 percent of its population. Today, only 3.5 million Puerto Ricans and others reside in Puerto Rico. All in all, about 60 percent of all Puerto Ricans now reside stateside. Of those, 70 percent were born in the U.S. and English is their native, and often only, language.

In the face of adverse circumstances in Puerto Rico and a challenging economy in the United States, the Puerto Rican story is one of resiliency and endurance, of going beyond survival, of facing challenges head-on and rebuilding communities, of welcoming newcomers and engaging in solidarity within Puerto Rico and with other communities across the country. Centro researchers have documented and studied these challenges and describe ongoing configurations of the Puerto Rican people, today almost nine million strong.

Migration from Puerto Rico to the United States continues to define the transformation of the Puerto Rican people from a predominantly island-based population to a growing diaspora dispersed over the states. The Puerto Rican population has grown in every state fueled by the twin engines of growth—natural reproduction of young families and new migrants from the island. Close to half a million Puerto Ricans migrated from the island to the United States between 2006 and 2015. Migration from Puerto Rico and interstate migration are redefining Puerto Rican settlements throughout the United States. Florida, primarily in central Florida, is the primary destination of migrants from Puerto Rico and people moving from New York and other northeast states. This demographic trend has sparked small business development, greater rates of homeownership, the celebration of cultural events, and increased political participation and electoral victories. [See Chapter 1]

Military service is an important element in the dispersion of Puerto Rican communities to non-traditional settlements, at the same time opening a pathway to the middle class. Veterans returning to communities near bases and taking military-related jobs have expanded settlements in the “New South” (the core former original Confederate states), the Midwest, and Western states. And veterans get a premium in the job market. Veterans and active military personnel are overrepresented in the higher household income categories, have lower unemployment rates than civilians, enjoy access to full medical services through VA
health facilities, and have higher rates of homeownership. Besides dispersing the diaspora to non-traditional settlements, military service has become a clear pathway to middle class status. [See Chapter 3]

Demographic growth and dispersion have sparked Puerto Rican small business formation. The growth of the Puerto Rican population in the U.S. has expanded the market for ethnic-specific services and products catering to this population, and, as businesses are established, they expand their reach and provide services to the broader community. The evidence presented in the Centro study discloses significant contributions of Puerto Rican business owners to their communities. According to the most recent report on business formation, as of 2012 there were 258,221 Puerto Rican-owned businesses that employed over 250,000 employees and generated $24.4 billion in sale revenues. These figures represent a substantial increase from the previous survey. Though a significant portion of these businesses was located in New York and Florida, the states with the largest concentration of Puerto Ricans, the expansion of small businesses occurred across the nation. Puerto Rican entrepreneurship is bringing economic development to communities across the nation. [See Chapter 6]

The dispersion of Puerto Rican to regions other than the Northeast—where real estate values are higher than in the rest of the country—has helped Puerto Ricans to recover some of the collective wealth loss during the Great Recession, estimated at over $50 billion.4 The average Puerto Rican homeowner lost $65,700, more than for any other group, and homeownership declined by more than 90,000 between 2007 and 2014. Homeownership rates for Puerto Ricans are higher in the Midwest and South and West regions, though still lower than for the population as a whole. [See Chapter 8]

Dispersion and growth of Puerto Rican communities around the United States have resulted in increasing Puerto Rican representation at all levels of government. This growth in political representation and power will be more evident in places where Puerto Ricans concentrate in sufficient numbers to have an impact on the electorate. In 2016, for instance, Puerto Ricans elected their fifth member of Congress, when Darren Soto won the congressional race in Central Florida. Overall, their turnout during Presidential elections has increased steadily from just over 45 percent in the 2000 elections to more than 52 percent in 2012, the last year for which data are available.5 The gap between Puerto Rican turnout in these Presidential elections and the turnout of the population as a whole has narrowed steadily as well. On the other hand, there are still challenges facing Puerto Ricans in the political arena. According to Centro researcher Carlos Vargas-Ramos, Puerto Ricans are not reaching their potential as a political force because not all of those eligible to register to vote have done so. [See Chapter 10]

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4 In 2007, there were 538,162 Puerto Rican homeowners, and their home mean value was $241,600 for a collective worth of $130.0 billion. In 2014, there were 448,096 homeowners, and their home mean value declined to $175,900 for a collective net worth of $78.8 billion. It follows that the collective wealth loss of 51.2 billion or 40 percent of the homeowners’ wealth, using 2007 as the baseline Source: American Community Survey, various years.
Migration, interstate mobility, business formation and renewed political participation are evidence of Puerto Rican resiliency and endurance. Migrants are leaving Puerto Rico in search of jobs. Movers are seeking professional and business opportunities in other states. New leadership pushes the boundaries of traditional electoral participation. This narrative is a very different one from that portraying Puerto Ricans as lazy Caribbean people with a tenuous attachment to the labor force. The Puerto Rican story is one of seeking jobs wherever they are available, as well as engaging in entrepreneurship and community revitalization.

Migration and internal migration are clearly revitalizing Puerto Rican communities around the country. However, this clearly positive impact on stateside communities is having a devastatingly negative effect on Puerto Rico. The Puerto Rican population in the island is aging rapidly, and youth and families in reproductive ages are leaving the island. Granted, as witnessed in prior decades, migration has served as an escape valve to an economy in crisis with high levels of unemployment. Indeed, some low wage occupational groups are overrepresented in the exodus from the island to the states. And for the first time we found evidence of a bifurcated flow, with a narrow occupational “brain drain” in STEM and health and medical occupations. Overall, emigrants from Puerto Rico are representative of the island’s labor force.

A persistent gap in Puerto Ricans’ educational attainment is clear evidence of the tenacity of inequality. Though Puerto Ricans have improved their educational attainment over the last decades, there were no significant gains when compared to the educational attainment of non-Hispanic whites. Persistent disadvantages in the schools and districts where Puerto Ricans are concentrated explain to a large degree persistent inequality in educational equity. Increased migration to certain school districts, especially from children that required dual language instruction, presents a challenge to parents and teachers in Central Florida and across the country. [See Chapters 4]

The transition of Puerto Rican youth to adulthood continues to present intractable social dilemmas. Puerto Rican youth ages 16 to 24 have rates of non-participation in school or work that are significantly higher than for other ethnic or racial groups. In 2015, Puerto Rican out of school and work youth rates (16% male, 17% female) were higher than for other Latinos (13%, 16%, respectfully) or Non-Hispanic Whites (10%, 10%, respectfully). Youth without high school diplomas are three times more likely to be unemployed, underemployed or working for very low wages. [See Chapters 5]
Puerto Rican Population by State, 2015

Disparities in health outcomes are among the critical challenges to the Puerto Rican community. Puerto Ricans exhibit higher morbidity rates of cancer, diabetes, alcohol consumption, asthma as well as higher infant mortality compared to other groups. Among these, diabetes is the second of the top five leading causes of death in the U.S. Puerto Ricans have a 33.7 incidence rate per 1,000 counts while this rate is 18.7 among non-Hispanic whites. A similar disparity is found in lifetime prevalence of asthma for the population 18 years of age or older. Puerto Ricans have an asthma prevalence of 22.5 percent of the population or 81 percent higher than the incidence for the population as a whole of 12.5 percent.

Medicaid expansion greatly benefitted stateside Puerto Ricans. The proportion of Puerto Ricans without health insurance dropped significantly after the introduction of the Affordable Care Act in 2010, especially in states where Medicaid coverage was expanded. Migration from Puerto Rico is often motivated by families' seeking access to adequate health services. Local communities in Central Florida, for example, have experienced a surge in Puerto Rican patients. As the health system in Puerto Rico is strained by budget cuts, Central Florida, Philadelphia and many other communities receive a wave of Puerto Rican migrants in need of health services. And as Centro researchers examine in this volume, maintaining access to health insurance both in the island and stateside has become a critical challenge for Puerto Ricans. [See Chapter 11]

Where do we go from here?

The economic crisis in Puerto Rico posits a challenge to the Puerto Rican people in the island and stateside. With government finances crumbling due to the debt crisis and an unfolding humanitarian crisis, the exodus of Puerto Ricans to the United States offers a direct link between the situation in Puerto Rico and every stateside Puerto Rican community. In the short span of a decade, the island lost ten percent of its population and stateside communities experienced a population boom not seen since the Great Migration of the 1950s. Puerto Ricans are more dispersed than ever before, starting new businesses at a record-setting pace; yet many remain in low wage labor markets, significant numbers of youth are not transitioning to higher education and many are still mired in poverty. As we have discussed above, these historical circumstances pose immense challenges and opportunities to the almost nine million Puerto Rican people.

Puerto Rican population growth and dispersion have created an opportunity for a more robust national footprint for political empowerment and economic opportunity. One of the various responses to the economic crisis has been the emergence of a “Diaspora Solidarity Movement.” This emerging civic and political movement encompasses many organizations, embraces a multiplicity of approaches to mobilization and solidarity, and shows great potential for asserting a more cohesive and forceful voice on matters affecting the Puerto Rican people stateside or in the island. Examples of actions embraced by organizations and leaders in the movement include calling upon Congress and the President to take action on Puerto Rico’s economic and fiscal crisis, and protest against austerity measures affecting the most vulnerable sectors.

There are multiple initiatives linking stateside Puerto Ricans to the island civic sectors and among themselves. Business leaders are beginning to examine how to use their purchasing power to support Puerto Rico’s economic revitalization and help stateside communities. It is estimated that of the total $141.8 billion of the Puerto Rican people income, $100 billion of this purchasing power is in stateside communities especially in New York ($21.9 billion) and Florida ($19.6 billion). And cultural organizations examine how to use their cultural capital to strengthen connections to Puerto Rico and among stateside organizations.

In response to the challenges and in the hopes of taking advantage of this historical window of opportunity, the Puerto Rico solidarity movement and the vast network of stateside Puerto Rican civic organizations are asking, “How do we create an effective action network, a more unified voice for Puerto Rico, Puerto Ricans?” Development of a more unified voice among stateside Puerto Ricans would position them to articulate a national response to how Congress makes decisions regarding Puerto Rico, to address the education gap and our youth transition to higher education, to insure access to adequate and culturally sensitive health services and to make Puerto Ricans’ vote count in presidential and local elections. Evidently, the crisis in Puerto Rico is transforming stateside Puerto Rican communities in ways that we are just beginning to understand and appreciate.

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7 Center for Disease Control and Prevention-National Center for Health Statistics, 2015.
Brooklyn’s Williamsburg witnessing both the promise community in New York City at a point of great Justo Marti’s collection of photographs of bodegas bodega also reminds one of the loss of an important the Puerto Rican people at a time when the culture of to the legal and extra-legal entrepreneurial spirit of promise as well as of great social challenges. As the son of a bodeguero and nephew of many New York City, New York State and the United States The Economic Impact of the Great Recession THE STATE OF PUERTO RICANS 2013: INTRODUCTION of Puerto Rican Youth to Adulthood at the Turn of the 21st Century School, Work and the Transition Human Development Index: RAÚL SEGURA CARLOS VARGAS-RAMOS ANNA ROSOFSKY — 2013 — THE STATE OF PUERTO RICANS GILBERTO GERENA VALENTÍN — 2013 — THE STATE OF PUERTO RICANS Gerena Valentín nos lleva al centro de las continuas luchas sindicales, políticas, sociales y culturales que Patriot: Puerto Rican Revolutionaries in 19th Century New York AmeRícan Poet Historian: Essays on the Works of Tato Laviera Forthcoming titles in 2014 mostly from the U.S. Census Bureau. The report presents a picture of endurance and resiliency in the midst collects in a single report the most current data on social, economic, and Edited by Edwin Meléndez and Carlos Vargas-Ramos Víctor Hernández-Vázquez ISBN: 9781945662027 This book recounts the genesis of the Puerto Rican community in Philadelphia during the interwar years (1917-1945). It connects the origins of this community to the mass migration of the post-WW II (1945-1985) years when Puerto Ricans consolidated their presence in Philadelphia. This study compares the experiences of Puerto Ricans with that of the Italians, the Polish, and African Americans in Philadelphia during the early twentieth century. The scholarship on Puerto Ricans outside of New York has been, by and large, limited to the postwar period and a closer examination of the interwar years provides us a more complete picture of how the postwar migrants were established and developed over a much longer period than previously believed. The Bodega: A cornerstone of Puerto Rican Barrios (The Justo Martí Collection) Carlos Sanabria ISBN 978-1945662065; 2016 This photo book is a compilation of photographs of bodegas in 1960s New York City shot by Cuban photographer Justo Martí. The book is a snapshot of the Puerto Rican community in New York City at a special point in time. The AmeRícan Poet Essays on the Work of Tato Laviera Edited by Stephanie Alvarez and William Luis ISBN: 978-1-878483-66-9 (pbk); 2014; 418 pages A collection of thirteen essays, an introduction and a foreword by fifteen established and emerging scholars. The essays discuss diverse aspects of Laviera’s life and substantial body of work that includes five published collections of poetry, twelve written and staged plays, and many years of political, social, literary and healthcare activism. Puerto Ricans at the Dawn of the New Millennium Edited by Edwin Meléndez and Carlos Vargas-Ramos ISBN 978-1-878483-79-9 (pbk); 2014; 319 pages This edited volume features chapters by Centro researchers and outside scholars presenting new research on social, economic, political and health conditions of the Puerto Rican population in the United States and highlighting the improvements and the challenges in this rapidly changing and growing community. Available on the Centro Store, www.centropr-store.com
Puerto Rican Heritage Cultural Ambassadors Program

The Puerto Rican Heritage Cultural Ambassadors Program is a national partnership of youth, community leaders, cultural and educational institutions devoted to promoting Puerto Rican culture.

The motivation behind our initiative is to cultivate leadership skills in Puerto Rican Youth so that they become a leaders of change for themselves and their communities.

Puerto Rican Heritage Teaching Toolkit

Centro has developed curricula and teaching guides, documentaries, professional conferences, workshops, posters and readings for students, educators, and community members to use as learning and teaching materials.

Our new user friendly website makes these tools available to you 24/7 while linking you to education and cultural partners, nationwide.

Reference Resources

Puerto Rico News informs and promotes discussion among stateside Puerto Ricans about current events related to Puerto Rico’s economic crisis. You may find briefs on recent developments, news articles from media outlets across the United States, and resources such as public records, reports, presentations, and other materials related to events happening on the island.

Puerto Rico News is available at: https://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/events-news/puerto-rico-news

Research Briefs are descriptive and topical summaries on specific areas of interest about the experience of the Puerto Rican population in the United States. These briefs include charts, tables, and narratives that describe the Puerto Rican population in the context of other, broader populations. Examples of such brief topics include subject of current pertinence, such as disconnected youth, migration, poverty, race-based differences, civic engagement, food and nutrition.

Data Sheets provide a brief narrative synopsis of conditions for Puerto Ricans in selected geographies throughout the United States (e.g., states, counties) relative to the general population of those jurisdictions based on the latest available data from the US Census Bureau. Some of the subject areas of these brief descriptive analyses of socioeconomic conditions for Puerto Ricans in these geographies are: income levels, poverty rates, employment status, educational attainment and housing tenure.

Data Center URL: https://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu/research-education/research/data-center
Our Mission
The Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College-CUNY is a research institute that is dedicated to the study and interpretation of the Puerto Rican experience in the United States and that produces and disseminates relevant interdisciplinary research. Centro also collects, preserves, and provides access to library resources documenting Puerto Rican history and culture. We seek to link scholarship to social action and policy debates and to contribute to the betterment of our community and enrichment of Puerto Rican studies.

Research
Our research department investigates, documents, and broadens the understanding of the Puerto Rican experience in the U.S. We heighten the impact of the data by sharing it in research-based conferences and publishing in original publications and refereed journals.

Library and Archives
The Centro Library and Archives is the world’s only institution solely dedicated to collecting, preserving, and disseminating the story of the stateside Puerto Rican. Our collections include audio and video oral histories, photographs, original works by prominent writers and artists, papers of elected officials, early records of major community organizations, and other primary materials available nowhere else. A major strength of the Library collection is the history of Puerto Ricans in the United States, particularly in New York and the Northeast region, and also in all the areas of the humanities, the social sciences and the arts.

Education
We support and expand the area of Puerto Rican Studies by offering opportunities for students and educators. Our Cultural Ambassadors Program educates our young people to be ambassadors of our rich history. For more information: centropr.nationbuilder.com/ambassador

Publications
Centro Press enables us to engage in robust participation in the fields of Puerto Rican, Latino, New York City, and American Studies. By taking advantage of our vast archival resources and connections in the Puerto Rican community, we disseminate crucial information about the Puerto Rican experience and contribution to the political, economic, and social cultures of the United States through the following mediums:

- CENTRO Journal - the premier journal of Puerto Rican studies and the place to go for contemporary analyses of the Puerto Rican experience.
- Centro Voices – our e-magazine profiles the multiple manifestations of Puerto Rican identity and culture.
- Puerto Rican Voices – videos highlighting the contributions of Puerto Ricans in the U.S.

Data Center
The Data Center packages and disseminates the most current information about Puerto Ricans. This information is provided to present socioeconomic and demographic portraits of the Puerto Rican population. The purpose is to provide basic descriptive information to scholars, policy makers and the public in general. The sources for this information are publically available repositories, such as the U.S. Census Bureau.

Events
Centro events look into our past, portray our present and explore our future, with lectures, panel discussions, performances, art exhibits and more. The series Puerto Rico, Puerto Ricans conferences bring together stateside Puerto Ricans to gain a broader understanding of how the economic and humanitarian crisis in Puerto Rico have affected those stateside.

Visit us on the web at: https://centropr.hunter.cuny.edu