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The Death of Governor Andrés González Muñoz and the Rise of Autonomy in Puerto Rico

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Abstract

Puerto Rico's road toward autonomy with Spain had been a long-sought goal. On January 11, 1898, General Andrés González Muñoz arrived in San Juan, Puerto Rico to assume governorship of the island and implement autonomy, a new form of government which gave the island the right of self-rule. This article provides an overview of the rise of autonomy and the important role played by González Muñoz in implementing it. Spain fought hard to keep its last remaining American colonies under its orb granting Puerto Rico and Cuba limited freedom and rights. González Muñoz who had played a role in ensuring that these American colonies would remain under Spain was tasked with ensuring its implementation. Upon his arrival, he attended required ceremonial duties. However, before the day was over, he had died. González Muñoz death contributed to the political uncertainty that would haunt Puerto Rico throughout 1898.

Keywords: Andrés González Muñoz, autonomy, Puerto Rico, Cuban war of independence, Spain colonialism

1. Andrés González Muñoz

It was just one sentence in the January 13, 1898, edition of the *New York Times*: "Gen. Gonzalez Munoz the new Captain General of Puerto Rico, died immediately after his arrival there."[1] Two days earlier, the transatlantic steamship *Buenos Aires,* arrived bringing a new governor to the island twelve days after sailing from the Spanish Port of Cadiz.[2] "The day began lovely," wrote Dr. Cayetano Coll y Toste, regional governor of the northern section of

[1] Anonymous, 1898, January 13.
[2] Anonymous, 1898, January 22, 39; Anonymous, 2022; Anonymous, 2024.

the island, a trained physician, and local historian.[3,] "The sun radiated overhead as waves gently splashed against the wharf."[4] All of San Juan seemed ablaze with merriment as church bells across the city chimed. In a photograph taken that day one can make out the three masts of the *Buenos Aires* moored in the San Juan Bay; in the foreground soldiers in their dress uniforms, are lined up with their M93 Spanish Mausers ready to present arms. An open coach harnessed to two colts can be seen in a corner of the photograph.[5] This was the scene that greeted newly appointed Governor-General Andrés González Muñoz.

González Muñoz was appointed governor of Puerto Rico on December 23,1897, by Queen Regent María Cristina of Austria, mother of twelve-year-old King Alfonso XIII of Spain.[6] Born in Santiago de Cuba in 1840, to a Venezuelan father and a Cuban mother, he was raised in Spain. In 1855 he entered the Segovia Artillery Academy graduating in 1862 as a lieutenant.[7] The *Ilustración Española y Americana*, a popular weekly Spanish magazine, described González Muñoz as "the personification of a valiant soldier, unyielding and enthusiastic."[8]

Returning to Cuba two years later González Muñoz's career began to soar with the outbreak of the Ten Years' War for Cuban independence in 1868. Combat actions in Cuba resulted in quick promotion to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.[9] In 1872 he was recalled back to Spain to defend the Spanish Crown at the outbreak of the Third Carlist War.

2. The Carlist Wars in Spain

The Third Carlist War arose partly from an ongoing debate in the Cortes, reflecting a long-standing struggle to establish an effective governmental system in Spain throughout the nineteenth century. This period of political contention was punctuated by violent disputes. Sweeping across Europe in pursuit of conquest, Napoleon Bonaparte had effectively subdued much of the continent by the year 1808. In that pivotal year, the warrior-child of the French Revolution marched into Spain. The weakened absolute monarchy under King Ferdinand VII, capitulated to Napoleon, who set up his brother Joseph Bonaparte as King. However, the Spanish people, aided by the British Army led by the Duke of Wellington, triumphed in the Peninsular War, not before many of Spain's colonies used the troubles of their mother country as the spark to begin prying themselves from Spanish rule.

Consequently, the despised Bourbon monarch, Ferdinand, was restored to the throne. Upon his return from exile in 1814, Ferdinand adopted repressive measures against the liberals, who had managed to establish an unprecedented constitution in 1812, guaranteeing limited political and religious freedoms not only for Spain but its overseas colonies.[10] In Puerto Rico,

[3] Coll y Toste, 1921, 101.
[4] Coll y Toste, 1921, 101.
[5] García, 1898, 81.
[6] Anonymous,1898, January 26.
[7] Negrón Hernández, 2022.
[8] Anonymous, 1898 February 8, 74.
[9] Anonymous, 1898, January 22; Anonymous,1898, February 8; Llofriu y Sagrera, 1870.
[10] Carr, 1982; Hargreaves-Mawdsley, 1973; for it effects in Puerto Rico see Rosario Rivera, 1995 and Santana, 1983.

the return to absolutism was greeted with resentment. But, where the other American colonies continued to rebel, Puerto Rico did not.

The ensuing fifty years became a battleground dominated by the desire for a liberal constitution. The primary adversaries in this struggle were the Church and the Army, the only two Spanish institutions to emerge with some degree of credibility from the Peninsular War. The Church staunchly upheld conservative principles, while the Army, largely influenced by freethinking Masons, leaned towards liberalism.[11] In 1820, a group of liberal officers forced Ferdinand to accept the 1812 constitution. Once more, these Spanish events effected Puerto Rico. The island was again considered to be an integral part of Spain, and was again, as it did during the Peninsular Wars, send another representative to the newly restrengthen Cortes.

However, in 1823, Ferdinand enlisted the aid of a French Army, known as the "Hundred Thousand Sons of Saint Louis," to help restore Spain to absolutism and annul the constitution. In 1833, Ferdinand VII died. Spain (and Puerto Rico) had little reason to regret his passing. From the fourth marriage of Ferdinand VII with Maria Cristina of Naples, Isabella II was born. The King legalized her succession to the throne by abolishing the Salic Law that excluded female accession to the throne. On the Kings death the queen mother became regent for the three-year old Isabella.

Ferdinand's fanatically pious brother don Carlos María Isidro Benito de Bourbon — who had been heir to the throne until Isabella was born — saw his ambitions dashed. In divided Spain he became a magnet for conservative reactionaries who supported the absolutist ultra-Catholic forces, pushing Maria Cristina into the arms of the liberals and the army.

Subsequently, in 1834, the conflict escalated into the First Carlist War, with the Church and ardent supporters of local regional rights in the north and northeast of Spain rallying behind don Carlos.[12]

This multifaceted conflict, characterized by religious strife and secessionist aspirations, concluded in 1839 with a partial victory for the liberals. Notably, all rebel Carlist officers were allowed to rejoin the regular Spanish army. As a result (and partially due to the diminished immediate political power resulting from the confiscation of church lands in 1837), the ongoing strife between liberals and conservatives resulted in a relentless series of *coups d'état* that alternated between supporting liberal and conservative interests, depending on the prevailing circumstances.

In Puerto Rico in 1837, the island was place under military rule. Governors came from Spain — a total of twenty-six of them between 1837 and 1874 alone — to control the population with a firm hand and keep a sharp eye out for any acts of rebellion.

This intriguing period ended in 1868 when Queen Isabella II, by then known for her promiscuity, was expelled from the throne by General Juan Prim, one of Spain's most prominent liberal generals. Although her excessive reliance on her ultra-right-wing confessor, Father Antonio María Claret, played a role in her expulsion, the true cause was a protest

[11] Hamnett, 1984; Vázquez and Fowler, 1996.
[12] Carr, 1982.

against the governmental system that Isabella had nebulously overseen. The rebellion that ousted the queen was largely greeted with joy and became known as *La Gloriosa,* or the "Glorious Revolution".[13]

Initially, Amadeo I, the brother of the King of Italy and the Duke of Aosta, was brought in as king. However, he quickly discovered that ruling Spain posed insurmountable challenges and abdicated just after a year. Consequently, the first Spanish Republic was established.

This six-year liberal period, known as the *Sexenio Democrático*, began in 1868, spawned the most progressive nineteenth century Spanish constitution, the 1869 Constitutio.[14] Newspapers published what they wanted without fear of censorship. Slavery was abolished but this did not apply to Puerto Rico until 1873 or Cuba until 1886; it also granted various local rights to the provinces, as the regions of Spain had become increasingly dissatisfied under mismanagement from Madrid. However, deciding on a new form of government proved more difficult. Eventually they opted to continue with a constitutional monarchy under a more democratic system that would contain the monarch. Unfortunately, the group of enlightened intellectuals who had devised this plan in Madrid lacked the power to prevent Spain's descent into chaos.

In the Basque and Catalan regions of Spain, the Carlists again resurfaced, rallying behind a grandson of Carlos the Old Pretender, that enjoyed considerable support from the Church. Meanwhile, in the southern and southeastern parts of Spain, numerous coastal towns declared themselves independent regions. Once again, the Army seized power to restore order. While quelling the chaos, the Generals determined that the only viable option was to reinstate the young son of the late Queen Isabella, who was then studying at the British Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, as King Alfonso XII.

Civil war broke out in 1872. This Third Carlist War saw the rebels capture much of Catalonia, Navarre, and the Basque country with "Save our religion!" as their battle cry.[15] Alfonso XII died in 1885 at the age of 27 leaving his son Alfonso XIII as heir with his mother María Cristina acting as Regent till 1902.

González Muñoz was called back from Cuba to help quell the Carlist uprising. During his deployment in Spain, González Muñoz participated in the capture of Miravet, a former Knights Templar castle in Tarragona, and at the siege of la Seu d'Urgell in northern Catalonia. He also saw action at La Solana in the La Mancha region, and in Montejurra and Estella in Navarre. Rising to the rank of Colonel, he remained in Spain until the end of the Carlist War four years later in 1876.

Retuning to Cuba in the midst of their rebellion, he was promoted to the rank of General.[16] On three occasions, in 1877, 1889 and in 1892, he served as governor of Santiago. While

[13] Gribble, 1913; Van der Kiste, 2007.
[14] Suárez Cortina, 2006, 28-29.
[15] Carr, 1982, 338-340; Herr 1974, 123-132.
[16] Anonymous, 1898, January 22.

serving in Cuba, he met and married doña Dolores López del Castillo y Colás.[17]

Cuba's revolt against Spain was waged in two major stages. The first of these — the Ten Years' War ended in 1878 by compromise with a promise of sweeping economic and civil reforms. The Treaty of Zanjón that ended the war was nothing but a seventeen-years truce. Spain, again defaulted on promised reforms and in 1895, suspended constitutional guarantees. Soon the simmering kettle quickly came to a boil.[18]

3. Late Nineteenth Century Puerto Rico

González Muñoz was familiar with Puerto Rico. On November 12, 1893, *La Correspondencia* noted his arrival from Havana.[19] On June 1, 1895, he was appointed second-in command (*segundo cabo general*) of the island, "one of the most desired postings for Generals." *La Correspondencia* commented about his appointment: "Speaking of General Andrés González Muñoz, recently appointed as 2nd Corporal of this General Captaincy, our correspondent in Madrid tells us: 'He, as well as his wife, is a native of Santiago de Cuba and a perfect and courteous gentleman. I have known him since school and can assure you that he is a straightforward man, with a very pleasant demeanor, and close to General Martínez Campos. He comes from the Artillery branch and participated in the campaigns in Cuba and against the Carlists, earning a just reputation. It is likely that he will embark with his distinguished family in Barcelona to depart from Cádiz on the 10th of November.'"[20] Historian Lidio Cruz Monclova comments that his brief nineteen-day sojourn was characterized by his persecution of the local press.[21]

Gonzalez Muñoz encountered a Puerto Rican society four centuries old and in the early stages of capitalist development. The Spanish colonial governors of Puerto Rico were often appointed as a reward for political services at home and alternated between paternalism and brutal repression dependent on the prevailing political whims in Spain. As the island developed a modest export economy, there emerged a realization of separate interests and a growing development of an island identity.[22]

By the 1860s the social structure of the island was a complex interplay of various elements further characterized by a separation between urban and rural areas. This included the colonial administration, comprising the governor, military officials, and the influence of the church. Urban merchants played a significant role, with larger businesses mainly dominated by Spanish *peninsulares* and foreign entrepreneurs, while smaller enterprises were mostly run by creoles.[23] Additionally, there existed a small professional class, consisting of lawyers, physicians, and teachers, who were for the most part educated in Europe. Merchants and bureaucrats, predominantly *peninsulares*, relied on their established connections with the colonial metropolis. The merchants benefited from a protected market that favored trade with

[17] De Santa Cruz y Mallén, 1940, 47.
[18] Ferrer, 1999; Foner, 1972.
[19] Anonymous, 1893, December 14.
[20] Anonymous, 1893, November, 12.
[21] Cruz Monclova, 1970, 147; Anonymous, 1895, November 22.
[22] Bergad, 1983; Picó, 1993; Scarano, 1981.
[23] Picó, 1993; Scarano, 1981.

Spain, while the bureaucrats administered the colonial government. Both groups staunchly supported Spanish rule. The urban bourgeoise consisted of government employees and small retail businesspersons who maintained close ties to Spanish political and commercial interests. At the bottom of the rung were artisans, laborers, and enslaved persons.

In rural Puerto Rico, the social structure was slightly different. The nascent creole bourgeoisie in Puerto Rico mainly comprised small and medium-sized landowners engaged in the cultivation and processing of coffee, tobacco, and sugar cane. *Hacendados*, mostly consisting of *peninsulares*, creoles, and foreigners, were often indebted to Spanish merchants. Additionally, there were "free" day laborers known as *jornaleros*, who were coerced into working under a system governed by workbooks, alongside enslaved individuals.[24] While there were some artisans and industrial workers scattered across the island, they had not yet coalesced into a unified urban workforce.[25] By 1898 when González Muñoz arrived in Puerto Rico both slavery and the formal jornaleros system had been abolished, but the social structure for the most part remained intact.

As in most colonial societies, the Puerto Rican affluent class was split into two factions. One group aligned their economic and political interests with the ruling power in Spain, aiming to maintain the existing status quo and ties to the colonial metropolis. The other sought to reform the colonial system, striving to accommodate local interests.

Conversely, the liberal faction consisted of individuals such as small-town merchants, professionals, and a select group of intellectuals. Their objectives revolved around advocating for unrestricted trade and a certain degree of self-governance while remaining under Spanish authority. Their ultimate goal was to fulfill their local political aspirations and foster a shared sense of community cohesion.

Despite the advantages Spanish rule brought to the creoles, there were also significant drawbacks. The special privileges granted to *peninsulares*, created a sense of inequality. Additionally, a restrictive mercantilist policy granted Spanish shipping and products a near-monopoly on colonial trade, limiting economic opportunities. Furthermore, Spain imposed high taxes on profitable industries like sugar, coffee, and tobacco, further straining the economy.[26]

Consequently, the nineteenth century witnessed frequent complaints from the creoles against what they considered the shameless exploitation by a Spanish colonial system. On occasion, discontent erupted into revolt. This was particularly evident on the western side of the island where an insurrection known as the *Grito de Lares* publicly proclaimed the island's independence in 1868. However, the 400 creole coffee farmers, laborers and enslaved persons who seized the town of Lares and subsequently attacked the town of San Sebastián were so ill-armed and ill-trained that the rebellion was easily suppressed.[27]

The skirmish at Lares failed to inspire Puerto Ricans to launch a serious liberation movement

[24] Bergad, 1983.
[25] Rodríguez-Silva, 2013; Picó, 1993; Scarano, 1981.
[26] Bergad, 1983.
[27] Bergad, 1983, 134-144; Jiménez de Wagenheim, 1985; Rivera, 1972.

as did Cuba. While Puerto Rico had its intellectual equivalents of the great Cuban revolutionary leaders, their efforts were more fantastical than realistic. Puerto Rican leadership, for the most part, preferred to rely on the strategy of extracting concessions from Madrid rather than directly challenging the Spanish government.[28]

4. The Road to Autonomy

The island's political road toward self-government was long. Proponents of autonomy, for the most part members of the creole landholding class, desired a self-governing Puerto Rico that would be an equal partner in a Spanish federation.[29]

In 1886-1887, a widespread financial crisis reverberated through the global economy.[30] This economic upheaval laid bare the Spanish government's inability to safeguard the economic well-being of Puerto Rico. Simultaneously, it exposed the powerlessness of the local elite on the island to safeguard their own interests. Moreover, the repercussions of this crisis exacerbated social conflicts.

In 1887, an assembly of Puerto Ricans met in the southern coastal city of Ponce and issued an appeal for self-government and permanent union with Spain. Convinced that autonomist supporters were plotting subversive acts, conservative factions on the island demanded Spain appoint a new military governor. The new Governor General immediately instituted a series of harsh punishments known as the *compontes*, a term that means “to rectify” or “to pacify”. The civil guard arrested hundreds of persons; many were tortured, and some were bludgeoned to death. Puerto Rican efforts to inform Spain were almost tragicomic, as even bottles with notes inside them were cast into the open sea with the hope that they would reach a sympathetic eye. In November 1887, sixteen autonomist leaders were incarcerated in the ancient Spanish fortress of *San Felipe del Morro*. Plans to execute them stalled when an autonomist sympathizer living on the neighboring Danish Island of St. Thomas informed Spain of the atrocities and the governor was removed from office. This period became known as the Terrible Year.[31]

The assembly was led by Román Baldorioty de Castro, who previously had been a prominent advocate against slavery in the Spanish Cortes. Baldorioty did not advocate for total separation from Spain. Instead, he believed in an alternative route to achieving self-governance for the island. He envisioned an autonomous Puerto Rico that remained part of the Spanish system. Under his vision, Spain would retain sovereignty, but the island would have authority over its own internal affairs. The Puerto Rican Autonomous Party was established during the Ponce convention, with Baldorioty serving as its leader. Baldorioty found himself among those incarcerated in 1887. Despite a relatively short stay in jail, his health deteriorated significantly as a result of his confinement, and he died two years later.

The founding of the autonomous party laid the groundwork for the modern day Popular Democratic Party and persists in the Commonwealth form of government that continues to

[28] Barbosa de Rosario, 1957; Meléndez, 2020; Negrón-Portillo, 1981.
[29] Cruz Monclova, 1966; Negrón-Portillo, 1981.
[30] Mandel, 1980; Mejias, 1973.
[31] Pedreira, 1948.

impact Puerto Rican politics today. However, the autonomous party was plagued by intense internal divisions. These divisions, as noted by an American observer, seemed to stem less from ideological differences and more from petty personal rivalries, leading to "unseemly partisan strife."[32]

One faction, led by journalist Luis Muñoz Rivera, believed that autonomy could only be achieved through cooperation with the governing monarchist party in Madrid. Muñoz lobbied Madrid and advocated for fusion with the Spanish Liberal Party, leading to the formation of the political party known as the fusionists. Given the cyclical rotation of parties in the Spanish Cortes, Muñoz was confident that his liberal allies would eventually return to power.

Dr. José Celso Barbosa, a black Puerto Rican who had received his medical education in the United States, stood as a rival to Muñoz.[33] Barbosa had moved up in the medical field through unwavering dedication to hard work and aspired for the autonomous party to achieve power through a similar path — characterized by hard work, effective organization, and democratic principles. The notion of a political bargain with Mateo Práxedes Sagasta repulsed him, and he firmly opposed any alliance with his monarchist party, regardless of its liberal leanings. He insisted that if they were going to collaborate that it should be with one of the republican parties, emphasizing the risks involved if Munoz backed an unsuccessful candidate that could spell doom for the autonomous movement. Barbosa adamantly asserted that he would not place his trust in the promises of a monarchist. A staunch advocate of republicanism, Barbosa held the belief that only the Spanish Republican Party could bestow autonomy. However, with the monarchy's restoration in 1874, the Spanish Republican Party dwindled into a minority party, dimming Barbosa's hopes.

These events did not diminish the autonomist spirit. Additional stimuli for the cause came from the activities of Rafael María de Labra who lived in Spain. De Labra, born in Cuba and raised in Spain, had been a key figure in the campaign for the abolition of slavery. He argued that Spain should reform its colonial policies and move toward the goal of providing autonomy to the island.[34]

The situation in Cuba was not much better. On April 10, 1892, the Cuban Revolutionary Party was established in New York City with the goal of winning independence for both Cuba and Puerto Rico. Founded by poet and revolutionary José Martí, he was convinced that the Ten Years War was lost, due in part to lack of central leadership and organization. Martí was elected Delegate, the highest party position. In February 1895, Martí gave the order that set off the armed rebellion. Arriving in Cuba with a copy of Cicero in his pocket and a revolver, Martí was soon killed in battle.[35]

The military aim of the Spanish government in Cuba was to push the rebel forces back from the west into the mountains of the east and there destroy them. Operating out of Bahía Honda on the north shore, 70 kilometers west of Havana, González Muñoz's campaign against the

[32] U.S. Army, 1899, 59.
[33] Barbosa de Rosario, 1957.
[34] De Labra, 1902, 274-284; Cubano Iguina, 1994.
[35] Martí, 1963; Martí, 1970; Ferrer, 1999; Auxier, 1939.

Cuban insurgents was brutal as he continued to pursue the scorched earth policy implemented by General Valeriano Weyler.[36] In September 1895 and February and May 1896, troops under his command set fire to buildings, cattle pens, bridges, orchards, fences and destroyed the plantations Cañada Honda, Veintiuna and Ranchón about 450 miles east of Havana, causing about $642,000 worth of damage (the equivalent of over $22 million in 2024).[37]

With the resurgence of revolutionary activity in Cuba, the United States began pressuring Spain for a prompt resolution.[38] On September 18, 1897, the American ambassador formally demanded that the Spanish Secretary of State provide "before the first of November next, such assurance as would satisfy the United States that early and certain peace can be promptly secured; and that otherwise the United States must consider itself free to take such steps as its government should deem necessary to procure the result, with due regard to its own interests and the general tranquility."[39]

Hoping to avoid a similar armed struggle in Puerto Rico, Muñoz Rivera traveled to Spain where he successfully elicited a promise from the head of the Liberal Party that once they obtained power, they would grant autonomy to the island. This unexpectedly occurred when an Italian anarchist killed Prime Minister Antonio Cánovas. Sagasta, the new Prime Minister, under pressure from the United States, kept his promise and in late October, the Spanish government informed the United States that it would grant Cuba and Puerto Rico autonomy.

Spain's decision to grant autonomy was a last-ditch effort to retain its final two possessions in the Americas. The Charter of Autonomy, officially ratified on November 25, 1897, finally bestowed upon Puerto Rico the right to self-governance. This landmark document extended a range of rights to the island, mirroring those held by Spanish citizens. In principle, autonomy promised Puerto Rico an elevated level of political freedom, effectively conferring upon it a quasi-dominion status.

These groundbreaking reforms empowered the island to elect representatives who could participate in the Cortes. Furthermore, the Charter introduced the election of an insular administrative council, equivalent to a Senate. Although the governor continued to be appointed by Spain, his authority was curtailed. While he retained the prerogative to select seven senators and could invoke emergency measures to suspend civil rights and refer legislation to Madrid if it was deemed unconstitutional, the island's legislature held sway over most significant matters. This included deliberation on critical issues such as adopting a budget, setting tariffs and taxes, and approving or rejecting commercial treaties negotiated by the Spanish Crown, that did not include island participation.[40]

5. The Death of a Governor

González Muñoz was tasked by the Crown to implement autonomy in Puerto Rico. On Christmas Day, 1897, a small announcement printed in *La Correspondencia* noted that,

[36] Ferrer, 1999; Tone, 2006; Meléndez, 2020.
[37] Richards, 1902.
[38] Foner, 1972, 1-97; Williams, 1980.
[39] Chadwick, 1909.
[40] Office of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, 1964, 22-46.

"according to a telegram received from <<La Intendencia>>, our most respected friend general González Muñoz has been appointed to the position of Captain-General of Puerto Rico."[41]

Upon appointment to his position, General González Muñoz received instructions from the Spanish government to facilitate the implementation of autonomy in Puerto Rico. *El Globo of Madrid*, the official government newspaper, reported that his primary task was to unite the island's various autonomist factions, and convince them of the benefits of mutual cooperation.

Before embarking for Puerto Rico, González Muñoz held a meeting with two key figures representing these different factions: Rafael Maria de Labra and Francisco García Molinas, both Liberal politicians, with the latter being born in San Juan. During this meeting, they reached an agreement on a power-sharing formula that met with González Muñoz's approval.

After the meeting, Muñoz Rivera, Barbosa and Manuel Fernández Juncos, a renowned writer and journalist, received telegrams encouraging them to abstain from participating in confrontational journalistic debates that might jeopardize the shared goal of achieving autonomy thus, cultivating a spirit of solidarity among the various pro-autonomist factions and preventing needless disputes that could impede the progress of its implementation.[42]

When González Muñoz disembarked from the *Buenos Aires* a little after eight that morning, rumors about his health had followed him for several years. On more than one occasion he was forced to leave the Cuban campaign and return to Spain for medical treatment. These rumors were reinforced when he arrived bringing his own physician. Most accounts suggest that he had dyspnea, a medical condition typified by subjective breathing discomfort.[43]

Eight sailors rowed the official reception party out to the *Buenos Aires*. Among the party were the mayor of San Juan; the President of the Appellate Court; the Commandant of the Navy; Interim Governor General Ricardo Ortega y Diez, and Dr. Coll y Toste.

His face looked ashen, and his feet appeared swollen as the governor cordially greeted the reception party. Shortly after being lowered into a rowboat that would take them ashore a light drizzle began. As the party waited for the rain to subside, the Governor impatiently asked, "Why aren't we moving?"

"My general," responded don Venancio Zorilla y Arredondo, President of the Appellate Court, "it's drizzling."

"No worries!" dismissed the Governor, "I'm used to getting wet on campaigns. Move!"

Upon reaching the shore of the Arsenal where the Spanish Navy was headquartered, the governor braced himself between the shoulders of San Juan mayor Francisco del Valle Atiles and Dr. Coll y Toste, lifting himself up into the carriage.

[41] Anonymous, 1897, December 25.
[42] Anonymous, 1893, January 14.
[43] Anonymous, 1898, January 12.

The governor took his seat in the rear. The carriage top was down, and the light drizzle continued. Two colts pulled the governor's coach. As they began leaving the Arsenal's grounds, a bugle call spooked the horses. Trying to control the restless animals, the coachman pulled hard on the reigns, nearly overturning the carriage. The governor whispered with a forlorn smile, "These beautiful colts are spirited but poorly trained."

Coll y Toste leaned toward General Ortega and whispered asking if he could order the bugler to cease blowing or the animals might bolt. "I can't," he whispered back, "General González Muñoz is now in charge." The Governor watched the coachman as he struggled to control the frightened horses. While the bugling continued incessantly, the General commented, "Valiant colts! I had good ones like these back in Cuba!"

It was the Chief of Police who discreetly signaled the bugler to cease. Soon the horses settled down and the governor and his entourage moved from the nearly overturned coach onto another. Underway at last, the official party slowly made its way to the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist as well-wishers crowded the sidewalks and looked out from their balconies.

As the party approached the Cathedral, Coll y Toste noted that the governor's cane had lost its gold tassel during the carriage change. When this was brought this to his attention, the governor sighed, "I lost more in Cuba as Maceo burnt my mill!" The governor had also lost a spur along the way, but no one brought it to his attention.

At the entrance to the sixteenth century Cathedral, the governor leaned on two members of the party for support as he made his way up the stairs that led into the grand church. As Bishop Toribio Minguella y Arnedo, O.A.R., began the Mass, he listened to the words of Saints Ambrose and Augustine thanksgiving hymn, *Te Deum* kneeling at a *prie-dieu* holding his head in his hands as he faced the floor:

> "*We praise thee, O God: we acknowledge thee to be the Lord.*
> *All the earth doth worship thee: the Father everlasting.*
> *To thee all Angels cry aloud: the Heavens, and all the Powers therein…"*

González Muñoz listened as the words of the tedium continued:

> *Thou art the King of Glory: O Christ.*
> *Thou art the everlasting Son: of the Father.*
> *When thou tookest upon thee to deliver man: thou didst not abhor the Virgin's womb.*
> *When thou hadst overcome the sharpness of death:*
> *thou didst open the Kingdom of Heaven to all believers.*
> *Thou sittest at the right hand of God: in the glory of the Father.*
> *We believe that thou shalt come: to be our Judge.*
> *We therefore pray thee, help thy servants:*
> *whom thou hast redeemed with thy precious blood.*
> *Make them to be numbered with thy Saints: in glory everlasting.*[44]

The service over, the governor was gently nudged from a trance and informed that the service

[44]Anonymous, 1867, 126-130.

was over. Exiting the church through the nave, he stopped by an altar boy offering a vessel of Holy Water, spilling some as he dipped his fingers to make the sign of the cross.

The official party again boarded the carriage for the brief three-block ride to the governor's mansion named *Palacio de Santa Catalina,* known as *La Fortaleza*. As the carriage approached the palace, the horses struggled to enter the tight gate and were unable to stop in front of the stairway leading up to the mansion.

"God! More mishaps!" yelled the exasperated governor.

Finally entering the mansion, the ailing governor raised his eyes to the heavens and exclaimed, "Thank you my Lord! At last I've arrived!"

Someone suggested to Ortega that they dispense the official audience after seeing that the governor looked pale, but he again answered, "General González Muñoz is in charge now. That is the way of the military, my friend. I'm required to follow orders and offer advice when queried, but not to precipitate or offer advice freely."

Governor González Muñoz' first official act was to issue a statement about autonomy. To the people of Puerto Rico, he announced his return to "this beautiful country" at a critical junction to implement "the autonomous regime granted to the Colony by the Metropolis [of Spain]." He noted that, "during my previous residency in this beautiful country … I had more than enough opportunity and ample time to appreciate your patriotism and loyalty, your noble qualities, and generous virtues, in which I always hope to find, and I am sure of it, the strongest support for everything that represents unwavering adherence to the established government."[45]

By expediting constitution-building, addressing administrative issues, and promoting economic growth, his aim was to ensure peace and prosperity under Spain's sovereignty. He continued, "for this purpose, we must all dedicate ourselves now to facilitate the prompt and rapid advancement of the current constituent period, abandoning doctrinal passions based on political differences, with the fruitful objective of directing our efforts towards the growth of agricultural and commercial interests, addressing local administrative problems, strengthening credit, reforming the tax system, promoting public works, and everything related to the sources of wealth, civilization, and the well-being of citizens."

He concluded, noting that he was always available to "to attend to your claims," and that he was fully committed to upholding fairness and effectiveness in resolving grievances. That he would conscientiously strive to reconcile equity and redress any issues that may arise "always being ready to defend your rights on all occasions, just as I am to seek the rigor of the law against those who commit offenses."

A second statement was issued to the Soldiers, Sailors and Volunteers thanking them for safeguarding "this beautiful portion of Spanish territory." He wrote that having been among you before, that he was aware of their military virtues, which "make you a steadfast safeguard of this beautiful portion of Spanish territory." Lastly, he expressed his pride in

[45] González Muñoz, 1898, Gobierno General de la isla de Puerto Rico: habitantes de Puerto Rico, 1.

greeting them and conveyed that "I place my complete trust in you".[46]

The audience ended, and the crowds dissipated.

Slightly before six o'clock that evening, Coll y Toste was summoned to return to the *Fortaleza*. In the large first floor vestibule laid the unconscious governor on improvised bedding. Attending Gonzalez was his own physician. Surrounding this makeshift bed were his wife doña Dolores and several other family members handkerchiefs in hand. Silence reigned throughout.

Coll y Toste, after being briefed by his medical colleague, leaned over to examine the governor. He noticed that the governor's family physician seemed overwhelmed and unable to communicate with the family. In response to the urgency of the moment, Coll y Toste rose to his feet and, with a resounding voice, thundered, "Gentlemen: Governor Captain General of Puerto Rico, don Andrés González Muñoz has ceased to exist!"

These events were reported to the United States by Consul Philip C. Hanna. On January 3, 1898, Hanna informed the State Department that Governor-General Sabas Marín had been recalled to Spain. On January 11, 1898, the new Governor-General, Andres Gonzalez Muñoz arrived from Spain "took charge of this office at noon and died at (6) six o'clock that evening." Notified of the untimely demise, Hanna attended the funeral, where he learned that the governor's "death resulted from wounds received in Cuba."[47]

The announcement of Governor González Muñoz' appointment and arrival as well as his subsequent death appeared the following day in the island's official newspaper, the *Gaceta de Puerto Rico*.

6. Conclusion

What would follow was a prelude to change in Puerto Rico as Ricardo de Ortega once again assumed command as interim governor. Quickly replaced by General Manuel Macías Casado he would serve one last time as interim Governor-General. On October 18, 1898, General Ortega las act was to officially relinquished control of the Island to the United States. Thus ended 405 years of Spanish colonial rule.

Andres González Muñoz was entrusted with the task of implementing autonomy in Puerto Rico, but it was General Macías who ultimately assumed this responsibility. In February 1898, the first autonomous government was established. Subsequently, elections were held in March of the same year, and Muñoz Rivera's Liberal Party emerged victorious. In early July, the government officially began operations. However, mounting tensions between Spain and the United States cast a shadow over Puerto Rico's brief experiment in self-government, as the Spanish-American War erupted, and the island faced invasion.[48]

Throughout the annals of Spain's history, reforms directed towards Puerto Rico were not

[46] González Muñoz, 1898, Soldados, marina y voluntarios, 1.
[47] Berry-Cabán, 2013.
[48] Rosario Natal, 1975.

guided by a consistent and cohesive colonial policy but rather stemmed from the pressing necessity to maintain Puerto Rico's favor during periods of turmoil. Over the protracted span from 1812 through the end of the century, the autonomists in Puerto Rico suffered successive defeats. For example, the reforms of 1812 were driven by the imperative to prevent a complete detachment from a weakened Spain in the aftermath of the Peninsular War. Furthermore, the island was viewed as a strategic stronghold for counterrevolutionary endeavors against Venezuela. Similarly, as the century drew to a close, the concession of autonomy was wrested from the Madrid government due to embarrassing setbacks experienced in Cuba, where General Weyler's brutal actions and the escalating hostility of American public opinion towards Spanish policies in Cuba were prominent factors.

Whenever a change in government transpired in Spain, it brought with it hopes of a more liberal regime, which the Puerto Rican autonomists greeted with jubilation — only to witness their aspirations shattered.

Hence, the contention that the Charter of 1897 never had a fair opportunity to demonstrate its worth or fulfill its pledges carries a poignant resonance. This argument presupposes a sustained commitment on Spain's part to uphold and expand these commitments if Puerto Rico had remained under Spanish dominion. However, the trajectory of Spanish national history in the twentieth century provides no grounds for nurturing such an expectation. It is unmistakable that the Puerto Rican liberal vision could not have achieved greater realization under these circumstances. Spain, marked by years of internal strife and class conflicts, was in no position to bestow upon its colonies a more magnanimous and open form of governance. Ramón Emeterio Betances, a prominent figure in the Lares revolt, exiled to France, aptly encapsulated this sentiment: “Spain cannot provide what it does not possess.”

As Dr. Coll y Toste left *La Fortaleza* that evening he reflected on the day’s events noting extreme happiness in the morning and sadness in the afternoon as he remembered the lines from the Papal coronation, “*Sic transit Gloria mundi!”,* “Thus passes the glory of the world.”

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