

Grito de Lares: Definition of the Nation

Julio Rosado

East Coast Coordinator,

Movimiento de Liberación Nacional

Speech in New York City,

September 23, 1978

The emergence of nations is an agonizing revolutionary process, which of necessity is born of human political and economic evolution, and erupts, suddenly, upon the face of history. This national emergence is, in turn, the result of a long process of racial and ethnic fusions, psychological and cultural molding, and transformations in the political and economic relations of humanity.

The nation, as the culminating point of this entire historical process, is thus defined as an organized entity within a specific geographic region, in which a people develop a homogeneous culture, a common psychology, a uniform economy, which sets these people apart from other people in national terms.

All of this is characteristic of Puerto Rico, throughout the length of a century of formation, beginning around the middle of the 18th century, and extending to that point in time when the entire process erupts into a national consciousness, forged on the anvil of steel, fire, and blood which was Lares on that 23rd of September of 1868.

The roots of Lares are to be found in the slave quarters of captured Africans, in the huts of Spanish paupers, in the survivors of the *Taino* people; and are traceable through the resulting mulatto and *mestizo* people, made possible by the presence of three races within the geographic boundaries of Puerto Rico.

The African gave us the genius of conspiracy which manifested itself in the Puerto Rican secret societies, very common to the Congolese in Puerto Rico. From the *Taino* we received an unconquerable rebelliousness. From the poor Spaniard, the genius of organizational method necessary to oppose the organization of colonialism.

But none of these elements by themselves explain the phenomenon that was Lares. It required the massive alienation of Spanish political and commercial life — the result of capitalist deformation in Spain, whose middle class miss the conquest of political power in the 18th century. In 18th century Spain, there is no industrial revolution, and as a result, the aristocracy is able to keep its feudal economy. This brings Spain into economic dependency, and brings the brutal exploitation of its colonies to satisfy the voracious consumerism of its aristocracy. It happens that the exploitation of gold and silver makes of Puerto Rico a strategic military foundation for the Spanish empire's navy, and therefore requires a military-type control.

The Puerto Rican native at the time is reduced to a mere supplier of hard labor for the wellbeing of the political-military aristocracy, both at home and in Spain.

In 1776, revolution breaks out in the British colonies of North America. A new form of government comes into being — the Constitutional Republic, based on a new political ideology, bourgeois liberalism. Then, the French Revolution, with its class content, where the bourgeoisie takes up the banner of the tri-color — equality, fraternity, humanity — and thus mobilizes the masses for the destruction of feudalism and the launching of capitalism.

In 1802, Haiti blows. The first independent nation of the Caribbean is born. Haiti, with a fundamental anti-slavery and anti-colonialist character, creates a consciousness, for the first time, that a third world country can organize masses to defeat one of the most powerful nations of its time.

In 1822, the entire continent of Latin America erupts in revolution against Spain, and after a long struggle, defeats the empire.

Above and beyond having become the refuge for French slavers fleeing Haiti, the home of the creole *gusanos* escaping a continent-wide revolution in Latin America, and the increased effort at colonial control now exercised by Spain, Puerto Rico does not escape the consciousness that these revolutions brought about. The bourgeois-humanist consciousness of the times was brought back by Puerto Rican creoles who had studied in the best European universities, and were thus exposed to the newest currents of thought. They return to Puerto Rico to the Society for the Abolition of Slavery, a reform movement which becomes the first organized opposition to the Spanish crown.

There are anti-slavery campaigns. Leaders emerge, like Segundo Ruiz Belvis, soon killed by Spanish agents while on a secret mission to Chile; and Ramón Emeterio Betances, the mulatto who goes on to become the great genius of the separatist conspiracy, and Father of the Nation.

With the murder of Ruiz Belvis comes the realization that slavery in Puerto Rico manifests itself more broadly than in the enslavement of Africans — as it did in the endless indentured servitude of poor whites, which tied them to the land in such a manner that when the land was sold, the peon was sold with it; and as it manifested itself in the work-books, which prevented peasants and freed Africans from travel from one place to another without the approval of the *Hacienda* master, or some Spaniard in a position of authority.

Betances soon realizes that these ills, together with slavery, could not be abolished without overthrowing Spanish colonialism in Puerto Rico. And like Betances, there were others — many others, masses: slaves, freedmen, mulattoes, whites, *mestizos* — who found themselves in agreement that there was a need to expel Spain from Puerto Rico — and this was the definition of the nationality.

The exploitation of the people, colonialist arrogance, and economic and political irrelevance take Puerto Ricans to the founding of the army of liberation. Here and now are born, not just [Capa Prieta](#), [Centro Bravo](#), Lancero del Norte and Lancero

del Sur; but the Masonic Lodge conspiracy, and the social and cultural groups which served as a cover for the Puerto Rican national conspiracy.

And even more: on the road to Lares, there is already present the ideology of class struggle. In Lares, we not only have the sewing of the traditional flag, but the flag with the red star, the white and black flag representing the unity of whites and Blacks, and the red flag of communist revolution, without a doubt inspired by the flag first raised in Paris in 1848, in France, where for the first in the history of humanity, there emerges a consciousness of class and social justice, under the leadership of a still-nascent communism.

Lares, then, is the root not only of the Puerto Rican nation, but of Puerto Rican ideological and class struggle. One day, history will reveal to us the names of those men and women who gave Lares its political content. One day, beyond the present maladies of colonialism and racism which envelop us, we shall know the names of those Africans who led slaves and freed alike from the coast into the mountains in order to make Lares possible. One day we shall know who inspired that red flag of Lares...

And there was much preparation for Lares. Enough to say that there was a conspiracy, and there were arms. That plans were found out and there were arrests. That centers of conspiracy were broken and arms captured. But even so, Lares came about on September 23, 1868. Manuel Rosado, the wood-cutter, of whom our grandparents speak, an ancestor of this Rosado family I represent, was an illiterate man who cut wood for charcoal to feed a large family. He travels selling charcoal throughout the entire mountain range. He goes to Lares, Jayuya, Ciales, Villalba, Yauco, and Adjuntas. He uses his work as a cover to coordinate an entire network of peasant-soldiers, and to carry messages between the leaders of the revolution, Mathias Brugman, Manuel Rojas, and other *hacienda* owners.

But, even thus, we know little about Lares. There was a meeting of the provisional government on the night of September 22 in a *hacienda* near Lares. Much is discussed. At dawn, Lares is attacked — a town strategically situated and which controls passage on the west between the northwestern and southwestern parts of Puerto Rico. The Spanish garrison is defeated, the republic is declared. The abolition of slavery is proclaimed, as is indentured servitude and the work-books. There is a mass outcry: ¡Viva Puerto Rico Libre!

But some Spaniards escape. They make their way to San Sebastián and Arecibo. The Spanish forces are mobilized to San Sebastián, through which the Army of Lares is to pass. They clash on September 24 at the Anon bridge. They fight all day. Manuel Rosado falls, and so do many of his *Macheteros*. The Army of Lares begins a retreat. The Spanish Army counterattacks again and again. The retreat becomes a rout. Two weeks later, the leaders of the revolution who had not fallen in battle are tracked down in the mountains and arrested. And here, the history of Lares comes to a stop. No historian writes again about Lares. But the armed struggle continued.

And the armed struggle continued in the so-called Seditious Parties, about which we are now finding out through lengthy research into written and oral history. And it seems now that, 13 years after Lares, the continuing armed struggle forced the Spaniards to end slavery, which happened in 1873. And the work-books were abolished — but the armed struggle continued. Thirteen years later, Spain imposes on Puerto Rico the so-called Corrections Law, which meant either prison or death by choking in public execution. But the armed struggle continues. In 1897, Spain grants the Charter of Autonomy, conceding independence to Puerto Rico, with few reservations. And the armed struggle continues.

We are told by those who were the generation of 1890, today old and filled with memories, that the Seditious Parties ranged along the entire Central Mountain Chain of Puerto Rico. They even controlled the countryside around the towns of Lares, Jayuya, Villalba, Ciales, and Adjuntas. They constantly attack those towns. In Ciales, one attack lasts a week, and we now know the name of the leader of that attack, Don Yiyo Ramos. In Adjuntas, we have the famous guerrillas of Aguila Blanca. And so the armed struggle continues.

When the *Yanquis* land in Guanica on July 25, 1898, Spain finds itself engaged in a two-front struggle. Facing them are *Yanqui* troops; at their backs, the *guerrilleros* from Ciales, Adjuntas, Yauco, Mayagüez, and other places. Because of this, Spain cannot mount a fixed defense. The Spanish presence in Puerto Rico thus comes to an end. The *Yanquis* take power. The Liberation Movement becomes inarticulate in the face of a new *Yanqui* strategy. The only forces, to our current knowledge, who continues the armed struggle, are the forces of Aguila Blanca. And because of them, there is continuity to the armed struggle. In 1902, four years after the military conquest of Puerto Rico by North American infantry, the guerrillas are silenced.

But armed struggle is not a question of passions. Sometimes it is necessary to cease military operations in order to consolidate, redirect, organize, and give it continuity. This is particularly true in those periods of time when the enemy, utilizing all of its resources, manages to confuse the masses, as it did between 1898 and 1924 in Puerto Rico. At these times, the struggle moves into a phase of organization and reorganization. A new generation, with new perspectives, is organized, trained, and mobilized. And in Puerto Rico this is finally achieved with the emergence of the Nationalist Party under the leadership of Don Pedro Albizu Campos. It is precisely this struggle which produces a Juan Antonio Corretjer, future teacher and leader of the Puerto Rican National Liberation Movement, and ideological guide to an entirely new generation — the generation of the 1960s.

With Don Pedro Albizu Campos, the reorientation and reorganization of Puerto Rican patriotism is completed. And the armed struggle continues. Puerto Ricans are massacred in Ponce. And the armed struggle continues. They change the name of the colony. And the armed struggle continues. They exile us by the hundreds of thousands to the United States. And the armed struggle continues —

but this time, extended to U.S. soil for the first time with Griselio and Oscar as examples; with Lolita, Rafael, Andrés, Irvin — and later, with those anonymous *compañeros* and *compañeras* of the clandestine organizations which today function in Puerto Rico and on U.S. soil; attacking, organizing, growing, and again attacking... and the armed struggle continues.

And after all this experience — these 110 years of continuous armed struggle — what have we learned?

It is essential to recognize that military actions are the result of preparation in the area of organized politics. It is the result of a strategy formulated beforehand, a tactical expression — a means to reach a political objective. And because this is the reality of things, anyone who would attempt to launch a small group, an armed elite, against the empire, will surely crash against the stone wall of failure.

But it is also true that armed struggle begins with the launching of small units whose tactical objective within a strategic revolutionary plan for independence is to harass the enemy, strengthen the military cadres, grow in practice and experience, in order, finally — whenever the independence movement deems it correct to go beyond sporadic actions — to have gained the tried and experienced commanders, the capable cadres who will direct new units, and the political leadership tried and proven in armed struggle — which is not the same as a political leadership tried and proven in rhetoric.

Surely, there will be losses. Certainly, there will be tragedies. And the people will ask: Where are they? What are they doing? Have they broken up? And suddenly there will be an armed response to these questions, in its own due time, in accord not with the wishes of the enemy, but in accord with the needs of the people. Today the attack is here. Tomorrow, there, in Puerto Rico. One day, in both at the same time. But certainly, where the enemy expects it least.

For those of us here today, the most important thing is to have developed a consciousness, as *compañero* Juan Antonio Corretjer says: "A clandestine consciousness. An awareness. A mode of thought which takes us beyond the eyes of the police and the FBI, and beyond the forces of repression. And even beyond the eyes of those who vacillate in the independence struggle and make war with their mouths, and still find twenty reasons as to why they should not make the leap from rebels to revolutionaries."

Today, we want to be at the level of Lares. Today, we want to continue what began that dawn of September 23, 1868. And to achieve this, we must defeat political opportunism, reformism, and political deviation, and redirect ourselves along the road of sacrifice, work, and organization. History teaches us that there is no other road. The martyrs of this new struggle: Antonio Martínez, Juan Rafael Caballero, Arnaldo Darío and Carlos Soto Arriví, and those who have died anonymously, urge us to continue the struggle.

Those who have become prisoners of war: Lolita Lebrón, Rafael Cancel Miranda, Oscar Collazo and Irvin Flores, William Morales, Pablo Marcano and Nydia

Esther Cuevas, and still others who must remain anonymous, demand of us that we continue the struggle.

Those presently protected by the clandestine network of the masses: Carlos Alberto Torres, Haydée Beltrán, Oscar López and Luz María López, and all those other *compañeros* and *compañeras* who must remain anonymous in clandestinity, command us to organize the struggle on many fronts, and call us to the road of national liberation. The road to Lares.

And the armed struggle will continue.

Viva Puerto Rico Libre
Long Live Revolutionary Unity
As in Lares, in New York
Independencia o Muerte