## Ramón Frade's *El Pan Nuestro*: The *Jíbaro* as a Visual Construction of Puerto Rican National Identity

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In Ramón Frade's painting, El Pan Nuestro (Our Bread) an oil on canvas dated to 1905, the figure of a Puerto Rican peasant, a jíbaro, imposingly occupies the center of the canvas (Figure 1). In Frade's interpretation of the jíbaro, the farmer walks towards the viewer carrying plantains, the literal and metaphorical fruits of his labor. The figure strides through the deep space of the Puerto Rican landscape towards the picture plane. Mountains and vegetation fade in a haze of atmospheric perspective. Land and peasant are rendered in the same palette of earth tones under a blue-white sky. The low horizon line allows the sky to frame the jíbaro's hands and face. The aureole of a golden-colored hat surrounds the jíbaro's face while his hands cradle the plantains that provide the central focus of the painting. A machete, both his tool and weapon, hangs from his waist and completes the jíbaro's attire.

For many Puerto Ricans, *El Pan Nuestro* and its monumental *jíbaro* are both familiar and revered visual icons of Puerto Rican culture. Reproductions of *El Pan Nuestro* and other representations of the *jíbaro*, including small wooden sculptures, can be found in many households. The peasant's image may be seen on the packaging of everyday objects such as "*El Jibarito*" brand pigeon peas. The *jíbaro* can also be seen in political propaganda relating to the Popular Democratic Party. The party's logo is a silhouette of the *jíbaro*'s face and *pava* hat painted in red with the words: bread, land, and liberty written at the bottom (Figure 2). Upon its creation the party's political agenda supported autonomy; at present, this middle-of-the-road party upholds Puerto Rico's current

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- Antonio Colorado designed the logo sometime between 1937 and 1938. The insignia was inscribed together with the party itself on July 22, 1938; it was created in order to remember "the forgotten man of the country." See Luis Muñoz Marín, *La Historia del Partido Popular Democrático* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial El Batey, 1984) 13, 99.
- The red as pointed out by German Rieckehoff in an interview was significant because it was meant to disassociate the party with people of color, a

commonwealth status, in opposition to movements for state-hood or independence. The image of the *jíbaro* is ever present in Puerto Rican life, it is found in the household and seen on television, appears at the supermarket and at the voting booth, and has profound, multivalent political and cultural implications.

Puerto Rico had been under Spanish rule since its colonization in 1493, and remained so until the Spanish-American War of 1898. The nineteenth century was marked by substantial political change and turmoil under the Spanish crown.<sup>3</sup> Two key events at the end of the century triggered broad sociocultural changes: the granting of autonomy by Spain on November 25, 1897, and the U.S. invasion of July 25, 1898.<sup>4</sup> Thus, Puerto Rico's short-lived autonomy was put to an end by the U.S. invasion, and the Treaty of Paris, signed on December 10, 1898, granted Puerto Rico to the United States as a territorial possession.<sup>5</sup> Nationalist sentiment had gained strength both before and after the Spanish-American War. It was in this socio-historical context of emerging nationalism that Ramón Frade produced his painting *El Pan Nuestro*.

Popular costumes and landscapes had become the leading themes in Puerto Rican art during the last decades of the nineteenth and first decades of the twentieth century; art seemed to provide a means of salvaging and celebrating national culture and identity under the United States occupation. The prevailing social concerns were focused on peasant and country life and may be described as regional in character. Most of the paintings produced at this time focused on

black colored silhouette might have been misinterpreted as a pro-black campaign. Furthermore, the color red was not meant to have socialist or Marxist associations. See Germán Rieckehoff, Interview with Luis M. Rodríguez Morales, Oral History of the Luis Muñoz Marín Foundation Archives, Section XIV, Puerto Rico, 21 Oct. 1985. For development of the logo as an idea see Antonio J.Colorado, Interview, Oral History of the Luis Muñoz Marín Foundation Archives, Section XIV, Puerto Rico, 12 Nov. 1981.

- Francisco A. Scarano, Puerto Rico: Cinco Siglos de Historia (San Juan, Puerto Rico: McGraw Hill, 1993) 460. I am indebted to Dr. Scarano for assistance in regards to the chamber of delegates and its members.
- 4 Scarano 528.
- 5 Scarano 543.
- Ana Riutort, Historia Breve del Arte Puertorriqueño en su Contexto Universal (Río Piedras, Puerto Rico: Editorial Plaza Major, Inc., 1994) 207.

ATHANOR XXII ILENIA COLÓN MENDOZA

genre and as such were called "costumbrista" (from the Spanish word for custom, costumbre). As a "costumbrista" artist, Ramón Frade painted landscapes, figures and other themes of traditional culture, and one of his most popular subjects was the jíbaro. Indeed of his 541 catalogued paintings, drawings, and sketches, up to eighty works present the jíbaro (Figure 3). Frade's El Pan Nuestro went beyond the traditional costumbrista painting as it addressed issues of national culture and identity together with Puerto Rico's current political status.

El Pan Nuestro has strong ties to European painting traditions of the romanticized peasant. Frade presents us with an old jíbaro peasant whose monumental representation recalls Millet's *The Sower* of 1850 (Figure 4).9 In both paintings the large figure of the peasant is shown in movement; the sower's action is stronger, he seems to run while the jíbaro walks towards the foreground of the painting. The jibaro's feet are firmly placed on the ground while those of the sower blend into the soil. Close to the picture plane, the figures advance as if they are about to step out of the canvas. The landscape functions to frame the peasants whose agricultural labors intrinsically relate them to the land. While the sower and his land appear anonymous, the jíbaro in El Pan Nuestro is portraitlike and the presence of a palm tree and bohio (hut) identify the jibaro's land as tropical. Millet's The Sower has been interpreted as a criticism of the social conditions in France during the late nineteenth century; likewise the jíbaro in Frade's El Pan Nuestro is a criticism of the social and political conditions in Puerto Rico at the turn of the century. Furthermore, the jibaro is a visual construction of national identity as it demonstrates the mythification process carried out by the Puerto Rican elite.

In *El Pan Nuestro* the portrayal of the figure and his surroundings reveal a great deal about the *jíbaro* as a national symbol of Puerto Rican culture. The low horizon line behind the figure calls attention to and establishes the strong relationship of the two, highlighting the land, for this is the country and the natural resource that is being taken over by end of the century colonization and industrialization. In this way the painter addresses both the invasion by the United States and

- J.A. Torres Martinó, "Puerto Rican Art in the Early Twentieth Century," Puerto Rico: Arte e Identidad, eds. HAGPR: Myrna Báez and José A. Torres Martinó (Río Piedras, Puerto Rico: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1998) 84. Martinó points out that a rare exception to the costumbrista artistic currents was Julio Tomás Martínez and his pseudosurrealism.
- Osiris Delgado Mercado, Ramón Frade León, pintor puertorriqueño (1875-1917) (Santo Domingo: Editora Corripio, 1988). The biography written by Dr. Osiris Delgado Mercado, his art pupil, and the most eminent art historian in Puerto Rico, is very complete in accounting his triumphs, vicissitudes, loves, and joys.
- Interestingly enough the hand gesture of Millet's *The Sower* has been referred to as a violent curse upon the rich charged with socialist commentary. The painting was seen as a revolutionary weapon. See Alfred Sensier, *Jean-François Millet: Peasant and Painter*, translated by Helena Kay (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1881) 111.

the jibaro's resulting loss of agricultural self-sufficiency. Land and peasant become one not only because of the relationship to each other, but also as a response to the parallel historical processes that threatened to annihilate both. Culture in its basic definition means tillage of the soil; as such, land and culture are inextricably linked to the jíbaro. 10 The plantains he carries are products of the land and environment that are key to his subsistence, literally his daily bread as the title suggests, since plantains were the staple food of the Puerto Rican peasant and were often eaten for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The title Our Bread (El Pan Nuestro) also has a religious connotation and can be referenced directly to Millet's favorite quotation from the Bible as noted by T.J. Clark: "In thy sweat of thy face thou shalt eat bread...". Thus, we see that the jíbaro is a complex symbol because in all his monumental glory he represents a country in a state of great change and great despair; his old age is a direct reference to himself as a symbol of a dying era. At a time immediately following the United States invasion and the devastation of the hurricane San Ciriaco in 1899, the jíbaro stands like "a flower in a ravaged garden," a symbol of the struggles of a population, and the last glimpse of hope for Puerto Rican culture. 12

The romanticized image of *El Pan Nuestro* parallels the development of the *jibarista* movement in literature and reveals the construction of the whitening myth carried out by the elite. Nineteenth century *jibarista* writings are characterized by a social progressive outlook in search for betterment of the *jibaro* while those of the twentieth century present a nostalgic longing for the past. These writings and the *jibaro* myth they perpetuate are seen by literary scholar Jose Luis González as an absolute rejection of afro-mestizo culture in which writers denied the true nature of ethnic composition of the island and the *jibaro* in particular.<sup>13</sup>

If we were to apply what was occuring in literature with similar occurances in art, Ramón Frade's work consequently fills our expectation of the nostalgic glorification of the peasant, and his painting, *El Pan Nuestro*, may be considered a manifestation of the *jibarista* movement. The painting's *jíbaro* is shown in a large and imposing manner, in his glorified state he occupies the foreground of the painting. Frade's por-

- Lilian Guerra, Popular Expression and National Identity in Puerto Rico, The Struggle for self, community and nation (Gainesville: U of Florida, 1998) 89.
- T.J. Clark, The Absolute Bourgeois: Artists and Politics in France 1848-1851 (New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1982) 89. Also see The Holy Bible (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989) Genesis 3:19.
- Banco Santander de Puerto Rico, comments by Dr. Osiris Delgado Mercado, Cuatro Siglos de Pintura Puertorriqueña (Madrid: Sociedad Editorial Electa España) 22.
- José Luis González, "Literature and National Identity," Puerto Rico: the Four Storeyed Country and Other Essays, trans. Gerald Guiness (New York: Markus Wiener Publishing, Inc., 1993) 66.

trayal of the jibaro also corresponds to the mythical belief that the jibaro was of Spanish descent. Although the morel skin color of the *jíbaro* seems to provide evidence to the contrary, the figure's darkness is related to the extended amounts of time he has labored in the sun. Because the jibaro's association with a European Spanish identity played a key role in his being accepted as a symbol of Puerto Rican national identity, Ramón Frade conformed to the myth that surrounded the jíbaro. 14 The Spanish-ness of Frade's figure also played to the prejudices of his intended audience, the Puerto Rican elite politicians whose own self-identities were based on a deeply held claim of Spanish ancestry. Thus, although Frade lived in the interior of the island and was intimately familiar with both the social and ethnic realities of the jíbaro, he portrayed the jíbaro with predominantly Spanish features. Frade's work is akin to the contemporary jibarista literature that promoted the whitening of the Puerto Rican peasant who was refashioned to meet the tastes and aspirations of the native elite. It is, therefore, a romanticized, sanitized and compromised image. As an upper middle class artist, Frade not only manipulated the jibaro's image but also identified himself romantically with the peasantry and the lower class.

The conditions of the production of *El Pan Nuestro* simultaneously reveal the underlying national symbolism of the *jíbaro* as well as Frade's use of the image to navigate turn-of-the-century racial identity politics. Ramón Frade produced the painting to support his request for government funding for his studies abroad in Italy (Figure 5). He sent the painting and an accompanying letter to the Chamber of Delegates. In order to evaluate Frade's request, a prominent artist was consulted regarding the painting's value. The Chamber Secretary, Felix Matos Bernier, received a positive response from the renowned Impressionist artist Francisco Oller (1833-1917).

After Oller's favorable response, Frade's petition was forwarded to the Beneficence Commission with an accompanying recommendation from Matos Bernier. The decision of the Beneficence Commission was to recommend an allowance of \$720 be granted towards Frade's expenses. The petition was then passed on to the Treasury and Budget Commission and approved on February 25, 1905. It was only then, at this late stage, that the American auditor and Secretary of State Regis H. Post vetoed the decision and denied Frade's funding. If

- Guerra 9. Also see Francisco Scarano, "The Jibaro Masquerade and the Subaltern Politics of Creole Identity Formation in Puerto Rico," American Historical Review 101 (Dec. 1996) 1398-1431.
- Delgado, Ramón 70. Original document: Dictamen de la Cámara de Delegados (February 25, 1905).
- Delgado, Ramón 72. Letter from Frade to Mr. Regis H. Post. (San Juan, P.R., February 15, 1906).
- Scarano 628, 630, 632. The Union Party's ideals for independence further-more served as the institutional origin of the Nationalist party of 1922. See Juan Manuel Carrión, "The Construction of Puerto Rican National Identi-

It is, perhaps, not surprising that the American authority put a stop to the approval of Frade's grant. Frade was familiar with the tastes of his Puerto Rican audience. The members of the Chamber of Delegates were all Puerto Rican, and a majority belonged to Puerto Rican Union Party, which supported autonomy and independence and was devoted to the defense of all things Puerto Rican: native industries, self-government, and culture (Table I). Frade was careful to provide the members of this body with an image that they wanted to see when he sent them a *jibaro*, a visual representation of Puerto Rican national identity.

What Frade did not take into consideration was the ultimate powerlessness of the Chamber of Delegates. The real power rested in the hands of the governor and the Executive Chamber, which was composed of a majority of Americans (Table II). Post, who was a member of this ultimate granting body, denied the request further scrutiny because he, too, understood the painting's message. As an American, Post undoubtedly found the painter's application unworthy of funding because of the *jíbaro's* nationalist and therefore presumably anti-American sentiment.

After Frade's petition was submitted and denied a second time, the painter sought an alternative means to fund his studies. On March 3, 1907, Frade proposed the sale of two portraits by his hand to the governor's residence, the Executive Mansion.<sup>18</sup> One of the portraits depicted the U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt, and the other the Governor of Puerto Rico in 1907, Beckman Winthrop (Figure 6). At this point Frade not only recognized who his real audience was, but moved quickly to give them what they wanted, paintings that commemorated and celebrated U.S. control over Puerto Rico. Subsequently, the Executive Chamber approved the sum of \$1,200 in exchange for the two painted portraits of the American leaders. Thus, it would seem that in order to elevate his status and advance his artistic career, Frade was all too willing to compromise his nationalist ideals. And he was, of course, successful, and began his European travels the following year. 19

Ramón Frade as a nationalist opposed Spanish domination over the island but he also resented the subsequent U.S. occupation.<sup>20</sup> His feelings towards the United States are revealed in a letter in which he criticizes the modern world that lacks focus on the noble arts. He holds the United States re-

- ties under U.S Colonialism," *Ethnicity, Race and Nationality in the Caribbean*, ed. Juan Manuel Carrión (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Institute of Caribbean Studies, 1997) 181.
- Delgado, Ramón 81. Original document: Copy of House Bill 150 (March 4, 1907).
- Delgado, Ramón 82.
- Delgado, Ramón 57 and Osiris Delgado Mercado, Personal Interview, May 31, 2001. In the brief interview Dr. Delgado answered the question: "To what political party, if any, did Frade belong to?" His reply: "Frade was not of political parties, he was a nationalist...." Original interview in Spanish.

sponsible for modernity and its vices, he writes "Yankeeland [United States] has been the pathogen that has propagated such calamities." Ramón Frade believed the U.S. occupation had seriously damaged the indigenous Puerto Rican culture. Nationalists saw the political domination of the U.S. as an impediment to Puerto Rico's progress and development as a nation. They felt that only through political and cultural independence would Puerto Rico attain its potential.

Frade's nationalist ideals are exemplified in El Pan Nuestro. The jibaro strides forward as he holds his plantains and carries his machete as if to question what will become of his culture. Just as the machete was the principal tool and weapon of the jibaro, macheteros was the name given to a group of jibaros who provoked insurgence after the American occupation.22 Still today, the machete serves as a symbol for those with independence sympathies. Puerto Rican revolutionary nationalists during the late 1970s and 1980s adopted the name Macheteros (The Machete Wielders) and chose the machete as their symbol of rebellion.23 The machete is further linked to socialist and populist labor movements,24 so that its appearance turns the jibaro into a symbol of nationalism and independence. Although the jibaro is not severely threatening, he is by no means passive, and the underlying significance of the implement was surely understood by Regis H. Post, as he vetoed Frade's funding. Ramón Frade's, El Pan Nuestro reflected the political ideals of its creator; the jibaro, central to the imagery of the work, was the ultimate symbol of those nationalist ideals.

The Spanish-American War served as a cultural turning point. It was after Puerto Rico came under U.S. rule that the growing nationalist sentiment crystalized. The arts of the turn of the century focused on solidifying a sense of Puerto Ricanness. A feeling of cultural belonging became understood as national identity and was defined by a collective consciousness.<sup>25</sup> National identity was expressed through the internalization of such symbols as the jibaro; this symbolic manipulation is the result of the construction of both a nation's past history and its identity.26 The jibaro's identity was the product of a mythifying process promoted by an elite that strove to idealize the popular class while establishing the "noble" peasant as the nation's identifying symbol. As a nationalist supporter of independence, Frade formulated the jibaro as a cultural and political icon. By portraying the jibaro in such a grand manner Frade elevated the jibaro to the status of a heroic liberator. The real entity of the jibaro had a mythological counterpart whose positive attributes were highlighted to define a national character that epitomized the ideal Puerto Rican. The historic peasant was taken beyond his reality to a mythical plateau as a liberator. Nationalism was the moving force in creating a sense of national identity while the arts served as the principle means of establishing the jibaro as cultural icon in an effort to keep Puerto Rican identity affoat at a time of political crisis.

The changes at the turn of the century before and after the Spanish-American War greatly affected the entire Puerto Rican population and the peasant in particular. Real jibaros suffered through the epoch's economical, social, cultural, and political transformations. Implementations of new labor systems, new areas of habitation, and a short lived autonomy put to an end by American colonization created a critical situation in the lives of peasants. As a liberator with machete at his side, the jibaro signified opposition to colonial rule and served as guardian of Puerto Rican culture. Frade illustrated in painting the peasant as a symbol of the chaos of the late nineteenth century. As a counterpart to the jibarista movement in literature, Frade glorified the jibaro and established him as an icon of Puerto Rican national identity. Ironically for Frade, the painting that today is revered for its cultural and political implications did little to advance his artistic career.

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<sup>21</sup> Delgado, Ramón 140. Original Spanish quotation: "...ha sido Yaquilandia el 'agente patógeno' que ha propagado tales calamidades."

Oscar Vázquez, "'A Better Place to Live' ": Government Agency Photography and the Transformations of the Puerto Rican jibaro," (Unpublished, 2000) 29. My sincerest gratitude to Dr. Vázquez for sharing his research.

<sup>23</sup> The underground publication of the Macheteros, El Machete features a prominent machete on the cover. The tri-monthly publication regards itself as the official "organ" of the popular boricua militia and it includes such

features as machetazos, caricatures and the addresses of incarcerated patriots. For more information on the Macheteros see Ronald Fernández, Los Macheteros: The Wells Fargo Robbery and the Violent Struggle for Puerto Rican Independence (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1987).

<sup>24</sup> Vázquez 29

<sup>25</sup> Carrión 159.

William Bloom, Personal Identity, National Identity, and International Relations (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990) 52.

[right] Figure 1. Ramón Frade, El Pan Nuestro (Our Bread), 1905, oil on canvas, 153.1 x 97.2 cm, Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, San Juan, Puerto Rico. Courtesy of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, San Juan, Puerto Rico.

[below left] Figure 2. Silueta del Jibaro: Pan, Tierra y Libertad, Logo of the Popular Democratic Party, 1937 to 1938, red ink on paper, Archivo Luis Muñoz Marin, Río Piedras, Puerto Rico. Courtesy of the Puerto Rican Popular Democratic Party.

[bottom left] Figure 3. Ramón Frade, Jibarito en la vereda (Peasant on the foot-path), n.d., oil on canvas mounted on board, 17.8 x 12.7 cm, University of Puerto Rico in Cayey. Courtesy of the Dr. Pio López Martinez University Museum, University of Puerto Rico, Cayey.

[bottom right] Figure 4. Jean-Francois Millet, The Sower, 1850, oil on canvas, 101.6 x 82.6 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Gift of Quincy Adams Shaw through Quincy A. Shaw, Jr., and Mrs. Marion Shaw Haughton. Photograph © 2003 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.





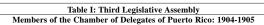




ATHANOR XXII ILENIA COLÓN MENDOZA







Abril y Ostaló, Mariano Puerto Rican Union Party Aponte, Clotilde Puerto Rican Republican Party Arrigalla García, Rafael Puerto Rican Union Party Bernardini de la Huerta, Tomás Puerto Rican Union Party Besosa, Pedro Juan Puerto Rican Republican Party Camuñas Grau, Manuel Puerto Rican Union Party Carrión Maduro, Tomás Puerto Rican Republican Party Coira, Francisco Puerto Rican Union Party Col Cuchí, José Puerto Rican Republican Party De Diego Martínez, José Puerto Rican Union Party Delgado, Rafael M. Puerto Rican Republican Party Del Valle, Rafael Puerto Rican Union Party Domenech, Manuel M. Puerto Rican Republican Party Puerto Rican Republican Party Feliú. Francisco Franco Soto, Carlos Puerto Rican Republican Party Gandía Córdova, Ramón Puerto Rican Union Party García Salgado, Octavio Puerto Rican Union Party Giol Texidor, Alejandro Puerto Rican Union Party González, Fernando Puerto Rican Union Party González García, Matías Puerto Rican Union Party Matienzo Cintrón, Rosendo\* Puerto Rican Union Party Medina González, Julio Puerto Rican Union Party Méndez Cardona, Ramón Puerto Rican Union Party Méndez Serrano, Aurelio Puerto Rican Republican Party Montalvo Guemard, Luis Puerto Rican Union Party Palmer Irizarry, Santiago R. Puerto Rican Union Party Quintero, Arturo Puerto Rican Union Party Ramos, Isidoro Puerto Rican Union Party Romero Rosa, Ramón Puerto Rican Union Party Santoni, Félix Puerto Rican Union Party Soler Martorell, Carlos M. Puerto Rican Union Party Vías Ocoteco, Juan F. Puerto Rican Union Party Virella, Federico E. Puerto Rican Union Party Virella Uribe, Valeriano Puerto Rican Union Party Zabala, Romualdo J. Puerto Rican Republican Party

\*President: Rosendo Matienzo Cintrón, 1905-1906 Secretary: Felipe Matos Bernier, 1905-1906

Total number of Republicans: 10 Total number of Unionists: 25



[facing page and above left] Figure 5. Photographs of Ramón Frade, 1904, University of Puerto Rico in Cayey. Courtesy of the Dr. Pío López Martínez University Museum, University of Puerto Rico, Cayey.

[above right] Figure 6. Attributed to Ramón Frade, *The Governor of Puerto Rico, Beckman Winthrop* (1874-1940), 1907, oil on canvas, Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, San Juan, Puerto Rico. Courtesy of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Barbosa, José Celso	Counselor	1900-1912
Crosas, Andrés	Counselor	1900-1907
Del Valle, Rafael	Counselor	1905-1913
Díaz Navarro, Hermino	Counselor	1904-1908
Elliot, William H.	Interior Commissioner	1900-1905
Falkner, Roland P.	Instruction Commissioner	1904-1907
Feuille, Frank	General Procurator	1905-1907
Grahame, Laurence H.	Interior Commissioner	1905-1910
Hynes, Thomas H.	Auditor	1905-1906
Post, Regis H.*	Auditor, Secretary, and Gov.	1903-1907
Sánchez Morales, Luis	Counselor	1905-1917
Stewart, Albert G.	General Procurer/Attorney	1905
Sweet, Willis	General Procurer /Attorney	1903-1905
Willoughby, William F.	Treasurer	1901-1909

Table I & II were compiled based on the research of two scholars:

Ortiz Mac Donald, Tomás, Legisladores y Funcionarios de la Asamblea Legislativa de Puerto Rico 1900-1972 (San Juan: Senado de Puerto Rico, 1971).

Rigual, Néstor, *Legisladores Puertorriqueños 1900-1996* (San Juan de Puerto Rico: Rigual, 1994) Pages: 43, 115, 116.