

THE SOVEREIGN COLONY

Olympic Sport,
National Identity,
and International Politics
in Puerto Rico

ANTONIO SOTOMAYOR

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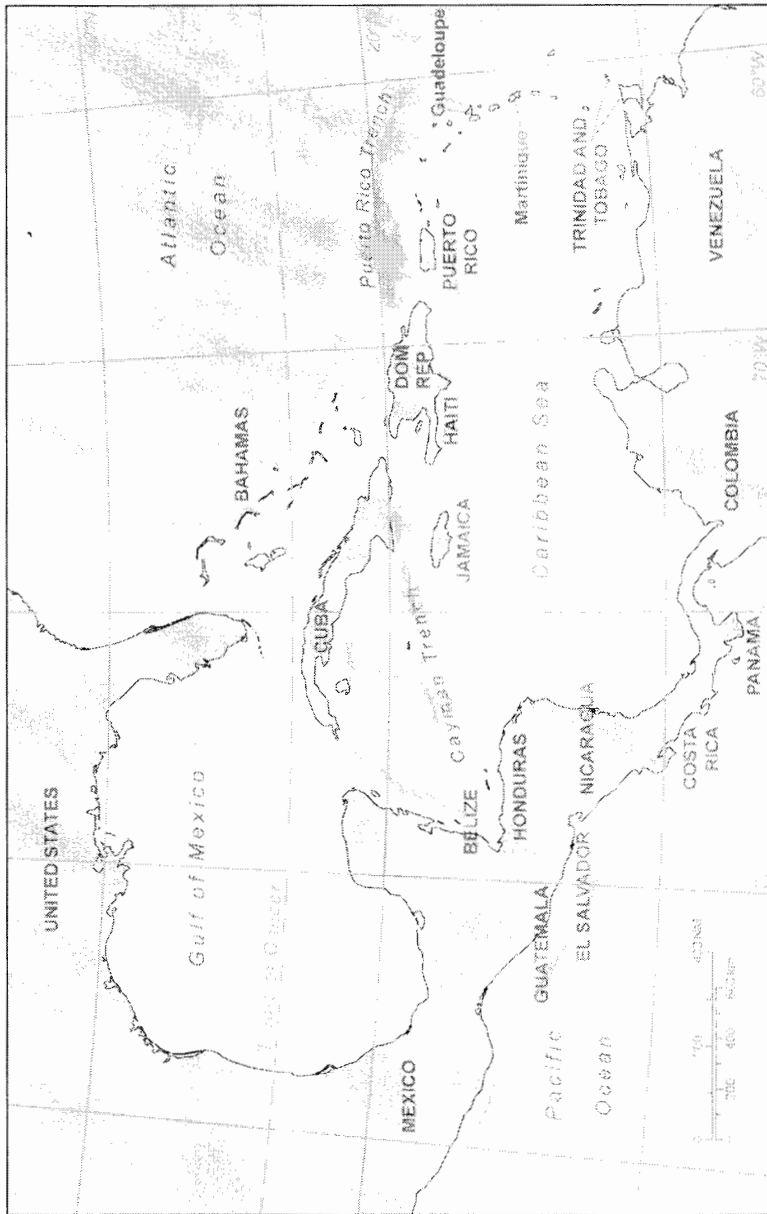
Para mi padre, Antonio Sotomayor Mora,
y madre, Sandra Carlo Santana.

To Nicole, who proves that dreams can
come true.

Para Paio y Amalia, son la luz en mi vida.

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Map 1. Central America and the Caribbean. Map by James V. Whitacre.

/ Introduction

On August 15, 2004, Puerto Rico faced the United States during the first day of basketball competition in Athens at the twenty-eighth Summer Olympic Games. Since their debut in 1960, this was the ninth Olympic Games appearance for the Puerto Rican basketball team. There was much anticipation; they faced the dreaded U.S. “Dream Team,” composed of the National Basketball Association (NBA) stars after the International Olympic Committee (IOC) allowed professional players to participate in the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona. The so-called Dream Team had not only been undefeated since 1992; they had crushed their opposition, winning the gold medal in 1992 by a margin of 44 points per game. I watched the game that day in the media room of my apartment complex with a group of friends (Mexicans and other Puerto Ricans) while a graduate student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I, a faithful fan of the Puerto Rican national team, endearingly called “Los 12 Magníficos,” followed the game closely.

The game started when Carlos Arroyo, Puerto Rico’s point guard, led the charge along with Puerto Rican legend José “Piculín” Ortiz, Larry Ayuso, Rolando Hourruitinier, Eddie Casiano, and Daniel Santiago, among others. The U.S. Dream Team included the usual NBA stars and some future Hall of Famers, including Allen Iverson, Tim Duncan, Lamar Odom, Dwayne Wade, LeBron James, and Amare Stoudemire. The game began at 8:00 p.m. Athens time, in front of 11,560 people. The first quarter was close, as each team made baskets and the defense cleared the boards. The quarter ended with Puerto Rico leading 21–20; I had no idea my heart could beat so fast. After



Fig. 1. Carlos Arroyo, point guard for the Puerto Rican national basketball team, during the U.S.–Puerto Rico game in 2004 in Athens. AP Photo/Michael Conroy.

the second quarter began, something utterly unrealistic and highly improbable happened: the Puerto Ricans took over the game and closed the second quarter on a 28–7 run, stunning the crowd and, indeed, the entire sports world. Meanwhile the Dream Team had fallen into a deep hole. The rest of the match resembled the first quarter. The U.S. “Nightmare Team,” as they were later called, tried unsuccessfully to make a comeback. Puerto Rico won the game. Carlos Arroyo made a name for himself, becoming a Puerto Rican hero, finishing with 24 points, 7 assists, and 4 steals as he proudly displayed the corners of his jersey showing the name “Puerto Rico.” The image was captured in an iconic photograph that traveled across the world (see fig. 1).

More significant, the game ended with the Puerto Ricans defeat-

ing the United States by an embarrassing 19-point margin, 92–73. This margin of defeat stands as the largest for any U.S. basketball team in Olympic history.¹ It was only the third loss in U.S. basketball Olympic history: twice to the Soviet Union, first in a controversial gold medal game in 1972 at the height of the cold war and then in the 1988 semifinals in Seoul.² At the end of the game the U.S. Olympic record was 109–3, although they lost two more times at Athens, to Lithuania in the preliminary round and to Argentina in the semifinals, winning a bronze. That moment in Urbana felt like the greatest achievement in Puerto Rican basketball, greater even than winning a gold medal.

On campus the next morning, colleagues, professors, staff, and other friends commented on the Puerto Rican victory over the Americans. They congratulated me as if I had been playing on the team. I could sense that some of them had been talking among themselves about the game, discussing the great victory for Puerto Rico, debating whether the U.S. team was still the Dream Team, and speculating about the up-and-coming talent of “international” basketball. Newspapers, sports networks, and newscasts commented on the lopsided defeat of the Americans to the Puerto Ricans and what this defeat meant to U.S. basketball.³ Many questioned basketball’s status as an “American” sport.⁴

Many sports commentators debated the tactical reasons for the loss, whether the U.S. team just had a bad game or the Puerto Rican team had a good game in terms of shooting, playing defense, or coaching.⁵ Admittedly I too questioned the potential of Puerto Rican basketball. After training as a scholar of Latin America and the Caribbean, I began to question the deeper meanings of this performance. I came to realize that what is most significant about this Puerto Rican victory against the United States, yet seldom acknowledged by the media, public, or scholarly community, is that it came at the hands of a small unincorporated island territory of the United States. That is, the U.S. team was defeated by other U.S. citizens. While analysts

commented on the strength of international basketball, they did not observe that this Puerto Rican team was not technically international.⁶ Rather than evaluating how the Puerto Ricans managed to beat the indestructible Dream Team, it is more pertinent to ask why this nonindependent island territory has a sovereign international athletic presence in the first place.

For Puerto Ricans who have been living under colonialism for more than five hundred years under two different empires, Olympic participation became a way to demonstrate that they are in fact a nation, a process that can be labeled colonial Olympism. This book relates the story of how Puerto Ricans, despite their colonial relation with the United States, were able to participate at regional and world Olympic events, and in doing so foster a strong sense of national identity and engage in international politics. Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the modern Olympics, anchored his neo-Olympism beliefs in classical Hellenic ideals of democracy and the human body in order to sponsor modern practices of physical education and foster international goodwill among the nations of the world.⁷ Keeping this in mind, colonial Olympism is in effect the process by which a colonial territory or postcolonial nation becomes fully immersed not only in Olympic competition but also in the struggle over cultural survival and political agency. In this regard colonial Olympism puts in a subaltern light two interlaced processes of modern Olympics: nationalism and international diplomacy. This story is not simply a negotiation over the terms of Olympic inclusion but also a negotiation over a hegemonic relation and colonial authority that tests the limits of sports and political autonomy and ultimately the meaning of the nation. Involved in these negotiations were Puerto Rican state and sport leaders, chief among them Julio Enrique Monagas (the father of Puerto Rican Olympism), different U.S. administrations, Latin American sport leaders, and the IOC.

Colonial Olympism encompasses more than world Olympic Games. It analyzes the roots, ideology, and meanings of the Olym-

pic movement as it relates to small peripheral nations and the larger international repercussions. While many Olympic studies center on the inter- and multidisciplinary analysis of world Olympic Games, I view Olympism in a more comprehensive and inclusive light, paying particular attention to regional games patronized by the IOC, including the Central American and Caribbean Games and the Pan-American Games. This is particularly relevant to peripheral small nations who send delegations to world Olympic Games but who may not stand a chance to win and excel. Regional games constitute a perfect platform on which to perform and showcase the nation competing on a more or less equal playing field. Still, for peripheral countries, being able to participate at world Olympic Games is the ultimate show of national pride. Attendance in the opening parade proves that the nation belongs and has a right to play, perhaps even a chance win, among the nations of the world. Yet for many other smaller countries, regional games are as relevant as the Olympics. This is even more pressing when these neighboring countries, whether politically friendly or antagonistic, compete and engage in athletic diplomacy. Hence it is imperative to consider regional international meets and the political context in which they occur, as they often have larger diplomatic implications.

Several questions were the impetus for this book: How does an Olympic nation exist if it is not an independent nation-state? What is the relationship between Olympic sovereignty and colonialism? How did Olympic participation help to foster a colonial national identity? What were the roles played by key individuals in Puerto Rico, the United States, Latin America, and the IOC in the negotiation between Olympic participation, colonialism, and diplomacy? What does the Puerto Rican Olympic story tell us about twentieth-century colonialism and postcolonialism, nationalism, Latin American sport and political cultures, and the Olympic movement? In answering these questions, this book contributes to four broad and interrelated areas. First, it contributes to Puerto Rican, Caribbean,

and Latin American political histories of sport; a study of sport at this length and conceptual depth has never been undertaken in Puerto Rican historiography. While there have been various studies on Puerto Rican national identity, colonialism, and popular culture, this is the first attempt at capturing the significance of Olympic sports for Puerto Rican culture and politics, contributing as well to a broader understanding of the Olympic movement in the Caribbean and Latin America. Second, this book seeks to broaden our understanding of Olympism and Olympic sports in general. Histories of the Olympics, nationalism, and diplomacy often center on the Summer Olympics and on more influential countries of the North Atlantic. In this book the focus is equally on regional and world Olympic Games, as they have been central in the formation of national identity and the engagement of international athletic diplomacy. Focus is also placed on a small peripheral nation in order to demonstrate that size is not always a sign of relevance. Third, this book seeks to contribute to our understanding of colonialism. Puerto Rico, being the oldest colony in the world, challenges notions of Latin American decolonization, adding an important case for twenty-first-century colonial and postcolonial studies. The reasons why this island and its people have endured 507 years of colonial rule, and why the past 117 have been under the United States—former colonies themselves and now the world leader in freedom and democracy—should be comprehended in all of their complexity and should be included in discussions of Latin American coloniality.⁸ Fourth, this book contributes to the literature on nationalism and national identity, especially as it relates to Caribbean and Latin American nationalisms. Colonialism for Puerto Ricans has not meant a full rejection of nationalism as a source of collective identity. Although many Puerto Ricans first and foremost identify as U.S. citizen residents of Puerto Rico (as they legally are), many others identify first and foremost as Puerto Rican nationals who have U.S. citizenship. The seemingly contradictory nature of these two concepts attests to the need to differen-

tiate between political nationalism and cultural nationalism. Puerto Rico's nationalism, for the most part, is cultural but also resides and thrives within the constraints of colonialism, owing much to the power and popularity of Olympic sports.

When I refer to the Puerto Rican nation I do so under Benedict Anderson's framework of imagined communities.⁹ Nations are a social, political, economic, and cultural construction of human action, both elite and popular, and not a natural expression of distinct peoples.¹⁰ That is, nations are created by human action; they do not evolve naturally from "time immemorial." Nonetheless, while nations are artificial, in the sense of being artifacts of "recent" historical production, they are real for many, and many have given their lives or killed for them. In terms of sport and the nation, Latin American soccer, for example, has been vital in the construction of national identities.¹¹ This is especially true with the advancement of mass media.¹²

Olympic delegations are great vehicles to explain nationalism because they represent the nation internationally in competitive events. In his classic book *Nations and Nationalism*, Eric Hobsbawm eloquently writes, "The imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people."¹³ Referencing Uruguay's world soccer success in the 1920s, the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano says, "The sky-blue shirt was proof of the existence of the nation: Uruguay was not a mistake. Soccer pulled this tiny country out of the shadows of universal anonymity."¹⁴ Therefore this study will enrich our understanding of the Olympic movement because it sheds light on the political process of culture making and the cultural process of nationalism to which the Olympic movement is intrinsically tied. Olympism has been a medium par excellence for cultural nationalism, in addition to international sport politics.

I particularly place my argument in line with the nationalism scholar Partha Chatterjee and the argument that nationalism and national identity are present in the colonial world, and not solely

an experience of Western nation-states.¹⁵ To be sure, Puerto Rican nationalism was not necessarily the “anticolonial nationalism” that Chatterjee describes, since some Puerto Ricans consented to colonialism under the commonwealth, but the “spiritual” and “cultural” aspects of identity in the colonial world are surely applicable. In this regard I also locate my theoretical framework on nationalism next to John Hutchinson’s argument that cultural nationalism can be a separate experience from political nationalism.¹⁶ Nationalism in Puerto Rico was constructed, performed, and celebrated within the parameters of colonial politics that gave preference to cultural expression rather than a political struggle for independence,¹⁷ constituting a unique case in Latin American history. As the historian Luis López argues, the Partido Popular Democrático (PPD), under the leadership of Luis Muñoz Marín, redefined the meanings of Puerto Rican nationalism from a political quest for freedom to a quest for socioeconomic reforms in association with the United States. For the autonomist wing of the PPD, liberty meant escaping the strictures of a backward agricultural economy and entering a progressive industrial age. Independence became an obsolete concept, and association and alliance, especially in the postwar world, became the centerpiece of political action.¹⁸

Puerto Rican cultural nationalism fits the parameters of the political autonomist tradition. The goal of Puerto Rican nationalism is to portray a sense of uniqueness that reflects centuries of Caribbean history and traditions yet does not aim for full independence. Instead Puerto Rican identity celebrates politically “safe” figures such as the peasant *jibaro*. Studied by scholars such as Francisco Scarano, Lillian Guerra, and Arlene Torres, since the late eighteenth century the *jibaro* has become a figure with multiple meanings.¹⁹ From being the symbol of backwardness and a figure of scorn to being celebrated as the soul of the traditional Puerto Rican, the *jibaro* represents the complexities of Puerto Rican identity. When celebrated, the *jibaro* symbolizes the white male farmer who lives and works in the rural

highlands, who silences not only women but also the pervasive presence of African culture, the result of hundreds of years of the Caribbean slave plantation system.²⁰ The *jibaro* has been the PPD’s official symbol since 1938.

Despite Puerto Rican colonialism, participating at regional and world Olympic Games has been the most preeminent, if not the ideal, way to mingle with the international community as a sovereign nation.²¹ Granted, Olympic sport is not the only venue available for Puerto Ricans to perform the nation. Music, the fine arts, culinary traditions, literature, and beauty pageants are all powerful expressions of national identity and have played key parts in creating a Puerto Rican imagined community. Yet sports actually represent and are directly sponsored by the Puerto Rican state, especially Puerto Rico’s Olympic Committee. The Miss Universe Puerto Rico pageant is perhaps the other important cultural event to showcase the Puerto Rican nation, and future research should focus on it. However, given the competitive nature of sports, with clear winners and losers, the Olympic delegation conveys a sense of community and nation different from a single individual.

While reading this book, remember that modern Olympism, as conceived by Coubertin and upheld by the IOC, sought to sponsor and nurture patriarchal values.²² Although the role of women in Puerto Rican Olympism is significant, they were relegated to a secondary level in the creation and justification of Puerto Rico’s Olympic Committee. Women, notably the 1938 Central American and Caribbean Games gold medalist Rebekah Colberg, have featured prominently in the construction of the Puerto Rican Olympic nation. The same can be said of black and mulatto Puerto Ricans. As a movement based in aristocratic circles and in Western racialized societies, Olympism favored and actually intended to support white racial superiority.²³ (It should be noted that two of the most important men in Puerto Rican sports were Julio Enrique Monagas, a mulatto, and Eugenio Guerra, a black Puerto Rican.) While gen-

der and race dynamics were and are relevant within the Olympic movement, a full analysis is beyond the scope of this book. Future research should unravel this complex and essential problem in Puerto Rico's Olympic movement.

In the absence of other formal venues, Puerto Rico's Olympic Committee provides a good vehicle to represent the Puerto Rican state through athletic diplomacy. Puerto Rico is not a member of the United Nations, the Organization of American States, or the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States. However, despite their absence at the UN, Puerto Ricans have the support of many UN members. At the June 2013 UN meeting, many Latin American states expressed their support for Puerto Rican self-determination and affirmed Puerto Rico's Latin American identity. Additionally the Special Committee on Decolonization drafted yet another resolution calling on the United States to accelerate a process that would allow Puerto Ricans to implement their inalienable right to self-determination and independence.²⁴ The International Olympic Committee has more members than the UN. Given that the Olympic Games attract more attention, sporting and political, than meetings of the UN, being a member of the IOC and participating at the Olympic Games are the best ways for both independent and non-independent nation-states to engage in diplomatic agency. As a Latin American and Caribbean Olympic nation, Puerto Rico has absolute legitimacy to join its regional neighbors in the celebration of international goodwill, but most important in showcasing the national self.

At the heart of the problem in Puerto Rican Olympic history is the process by which an Olympic "sovereign" delegation can provide a sense of autonomy, or even decolonization, while still being bound to its colonial strictures. While Puerto Rico is considered a Latin American country and nation, it is the only one in the region owned by the United States. For Puerto Ricans, having a National Olympic Committee while still holding and benefiting from U.S. citizenship (unrestricted travel to and from the United States, employment

opportunities in the United States, welfare benefits), actually prolongs the colonial relation. With a stable sense of Puerto Rican nationhood, having an Olympic representation fulfills the need to see the nation performed. At the same time, with growing economic dependency on the United States, increased federal welfare assistance, and transnational migrations, territorial status becomes for many a despised necessity. In light of this political and cultural paradox, Puerto Rican Olympism has actually helped consolidate a colonial relation by allowing Puerto Ricans to have the best of both worlds: a sovereign Olympic nation and a close association with the United States.

While Puerto Rican Olympism has accommodated the continuation of colonial relations, it should not be taken as the desired outcome of Puerto Rican national identity or among the political leadership. To the contrary, since the late nineteenth century Puerto Rican political culture and tradition have centered on a desire for cultural and political autonomy in association with either Spain or the United States or as a fully annexed state of the United States rather than independence.²⁵ In the dawning decades of the nineteenth century, Puerto Rican liberals struggling against Spanish colonialism sought a diplomatic arrangement for provincial autonomy rather than embarking on an outright independence insurrection. Despite an influential conservative sector loyal to Spain, Puerto Ricans saw themselves as both Spaniards and Puerto Ricans and in 1897 obtained the long coveted Autonomic Charter from Spain that granted full local autonomy and more representation at the Spanish Cortes. When the United States invaded during the Spanish-American War of 1898, Puerto Rican politics switched gears, seeking autonomy within a very different imperial system. Different political factions welcomed the new regime, with its promise of democracy, liberalism, and progress. Major political parties were divided along lines of full annexation as a state of the Union or independence. Yet the wide gap between the promise and the practice of democracy led to active criticism and negotiation over the terms of colonialism.²⁶

Much of the story in this book revolves around the autonomists, not because the other movements (independence and U.S. statehood) were irrelevant to Olympic sports but because Puerto Rico's incursion into the Olympic cycle mainly occurred within the autonomist movement. Although there are many followers of U.S. statehood (called *estadistas*) who enjoy Puerto Rico's success in Olympic meets, most of them would accept eliminating Olympic representation as the price of U.S. statehood. Due to the nationalistic overtones of the Olympics, it is understandable why *estadistas* might frown upon it, given that as a U.S. state Puerto Rico would not be able to have its own Olympic team.²⁷ However, one might think that pro-independence followers (called *independentistas*) would cherish, support, and nurture national Olympic representation. While this is true today, it was not always the case. Of the thousands of documents and newspaper articles in libraries and archives in Puerto Rico and the United States, only a handful indicated or suggested an *independentista* perspective on Puerto Rico's Olympic movement during the 1930s, 1940s, and early 1950s. The majority of those involved in Puerto Rico's Olympic movement, the autonomists, worked within and for a stronger relationship with the United States, openly using Olympic delegations as a diplomatic envoy to foster the U.S. Good Neighbor policy in Latin America in the 1930s, to showcase a decolonized commonwealth in the 1950s and 1960s, and for tourism and economic benefits. While performing the nation was certainly in the minds of some Olympic athletes, leaders, and followers during these decades, for those in the administration it was more a matter of U.S. diplomacy, economic interests, and local hegemony.

The 1930s was a decade of significant nationalist activism and the rise of Puerto Rico's Partido Nacionalista, led by Pedro Albizu Campos. However, the PN did not have an official position on Puerto Rico's Olympic representation. Albizu Campos's major speeches during the 1930s, including ones given after Puerto Rico's participation at the Central American and Caribbean Games in 1935 (where

the flag bearer was a nationalist student), did not mention Puerto Rico's Olympic delegation.²⁸ Scholars so far have not studied this side of Albizu Campos's ideology.²⁹ In trying to understand the PN's silence on Puerto Rico's early Olympic strides, two points must be acknowledged. First, some prominent PN leaders, including Albizu Campos, were not athletes themselves and did not see the importance of sports or Olympic participation in the struggle for Puerto Rican independence during the 1930s and 1940s.³⁰ Second, the PN did not recognize U.S. authority in the island. Calling for abstention in the 1936 general election, Albizu Campos's PN affirmed, "Yankee rule in Puerto Rico is null and the Yankee Empire does not have the right to convene the Puerto Rican nation for elections under its flag."³¹ Given this posture, one explanation of the PN's silence on Puerto Rican Olympism might be that they did not recognize a Puerto Rican delegation that officially represented the United States and carried the U.S. flag. In other words, the nationalists were not going to endorse or celebrate an Olympic delegation convened and organized by the colonial state in compliance with and representing the United States. It was only after the recognition of the increasing popularity in Olympic sports, the creation of the commonwealth, the official use of the Puerto Rican flag in international competition, and a new generation within the movement in the 1960s that the nationalists, now organized under the Movimiento Pro Independencia, recognized the importance of Olympic sports for the nation and would defend it at all costs.

However, the nationalists did have representation and a voice at regional and Olympic Games. Some athletes, including Juan Juarbe Juarbe and Manuel Luciano, made sure to showcase their nationalist or anti-imperialist sentiments at the Games. Their acts were well received by some throughout the region and were scorned by other Puerto Ricans and by U.S. officials. Margaret Power's insights into the transnational Latin American solidarity networks nurtured by the PN and Albizu Campos since the 1920s can help explain these

incidents as examples of Latin American solidarity with Puerto Rican nationalists.³²

A key idea behind the paradox of Puerto Rican colonial Olympism is that U.S. citizenship, granted in 1917, and Puerto Rican national identity were not mutually exclusive. By participating under the name Puerto Rico, showcasing their nationhood, and doing this as U.S. citizens, Puerto Rican Olympic athletes defined the terms of their colonial existence. Nothing in the terms of the Jones Act of 1917, which granted U.S. citizenship, included a ban on a Puerto Rican Olympic delegation. The 1952 Constitution, which did not alter the U.S. citizenship statute of 1917, also did not mention the Olympic delegation. Puerto Rico's Olympic participation as U.S. citizens was negotiated on the spot—between different agencies and individuals in the United States, Puerto Rico, and the IOC—at every meet they were invited to or participated in.

Puerto Rico's Olympic story is as much a story of cultural survival as it is a story of politics and international diplomacy. Puerto Ricans used, and still use, the limits of their colonial structures to claim national existence and continue an autonomist political tradition. They used a central feature of twentieth-century U.S. colonialism and Olympism, mainly the championing of democracy, to participate in Olympic sports, and by doing so showcasing the national self. They took advantage of Coubertin's Hellenic inspiration and desire for national inclusiveness, whether sovereign or not, in his revival of the Olympic Games.³³ In this regard, Coubertin was convinced of the necessity to spread Olympism to all corners of the world. Similarly Puerto Ricans understood the U.S. interests in the region and embraced their role as the Latin Caribbean representative for the U.S. Good Neighbor policy at the Central American and Caribbean Games. These Games were the perfect place to practice political diplomacy by showing they were as Puerto Rican as they were U.S. citizens.

Diplomatically Puerto Ricans were a part in the U.S. imperial

sphere of sports as a means to spread U.S. political influences abroad, as Robert Elias shows in the case of baseball.³⁴ More generally Gerald Gems demonstrates how the United States used sports in spreading cultural imperialism through an “athletic crusade.” The U.S. expansionist zeal in the phrase *manifest destiny* would shape imperial ambitions.³⁵ Once the United States had firm roots in the island, the Puerto Rican Olympic delegation of the 1930s, in their capacity as U.S. citizens, became diplomatic athletes to bridge Anglo and Latin American political and cultural differences. This role was actually welcomed by Puerto Ricans who had decided early in the occupation, and as part of an Americanization project, to accept the progressive and modernizing influence of the United States. When the United States took over the island in 1898, it sought to convert locals to fit the cultural values and politico-economic interests of its growing empire. As such it carried out an Americanization project that included, among other things, an overhaul of the education system in place under Spanish rule. Similar Americanization projects had been implemented in the continental United States for Native Americans, African Americans, and Irish immigrants. The goal of Americanization was to make English the lingua franca in Puerto Rico and to replace Spanish with American traditions and values, among them sport and physical education.

If sport was a source of diplomacy and Americanization, this occurred as part of a negotiation process between U.S. political interests and Puerto Rican struggles for national progress. As the historian Solsiree del Moral skillfully argues in *Negotiating Empire*, Puerto Ricans negotiated the elements of this Americanization project, rejecting the ones they perceived as threatening identity and pride but accepting the ones they believed helped them to progress. While adhering to their Spanish Caribbean traditions and cultures spanning four hundred years, Puerto Ricans welcomed in their visions of nation U.S. ideals of progress, including the promise of democracy, civil equality, popular and progressive mass education,

and more and better sports and physical education. Besides Americanizing in their adoption of sports, Puerto Ricans also immersed themselves in U.S. capitalist and consumerist culture, rock music, and Protestantism. However, they managed to keep those elements at the core of what made them a unique Latin and Caribbean people. In this regard they are similar to other Latin American countries where baseball, rock music, and Protestantism have thrived.

Puerto Ricans did not integrate into U.S. Olympic structures and rejected a proposal in 1948 to merge with the U.S. Olympic Committee, as Hawaii and Alaska had done prior to their incorporation as states of the Union. Moreover Puerto Ricans overcame colonial Olympic suppression and claimed a legitimate place among Olympic nations, aided by external factors such as other Central American countries, the International Olympic Committee, and Avery Brundage, president of the U.S. Olympic Committee (1928–53) and International Olympic Committee (1952–72). These external factors go beyond the national boundaries that aid in the creation of national identity and add another layer to the complex and multifactorial process of nationalism and national identity.

This book departs from older histories of colonialism that focused on clearly drawn lines between oppressor and oppressed. Instead the story of Puerto Rican Olympic sports confirms that some Puerto Ricans were as responsible for their colonial strictures as some Americans were champions of the Puerto Rican Olympic nation. For example, sport leaders such as Justo Rivera Cabrera and even Julio Enrique Monagas in the 1930s and 1940s upheld the primacy of Puerto Rico's association to U.S. sports and citizenship rather than willfully advancing international athletic participation. On the other hand, Blanton Winship, a U.S.-appointed governor known for his repressive administration during the 1930s, was an open supporter of Puerto Rico's athletic participation abroad, and Brundage supported Puerto Rico's continuing participation in Olympic international competition.

While many Puerto Ricans viewed sports and Olympism as a source of national identity, others viewed sports as beneficial to physical health, tourism, and goodwill; some even viewed sports as a political contribution to athletic diplomacy. The popularity of sport and Olympic competition moved many to follow the Puerto Rican delegation as it competed abroad. For others, sport was a way to represent U.S. democracy and progress internationally as U.S. citizens. Some athletes were proud of being Puerto Rican; others just aspired to compete and prove themselves against other elite athletes, often other college students.

The construction of a Puerto Rican national identity through sport was intertwined with international politics. The Good Neighbor policy, World War II, the decolonization movements, and the cold war all had profound roles in Puerto Rican Olympic participation. Puerto Rico was not the only Latin American country involved in this process. In his study of President Juan Domingo Peron's use of sports in Argentina, Cesar Torres concludes, "The Peronist state comprehended the powerful symbolism and high visibility of international sport, especially in light of its competitive character, and invested profusely in it. In doing so, it fully included sponsoring, bidding, participating, and hosting large international sporting events to the repertoire of available diplomatic instruments. Thus the athletes of the New Argentina were conceived as effective ambassadors, capable of multiplying, or even surpassing, the efforts of traditional diplomacy."³⁶ For Puerto Rico, the Olympic delegation became not only proof that the nation existed but also an athletic diplomatic envoy to demonstrate U.S. goodwill and to help support the International Olympic Committee's own existence.

International politics and Olympic Games are good platforms on which to test national and sport strength. In the case of Puerto Rico, these developed within the limits of empire and the construction of an autonomist political culture. Having experienced the lack of development of mass sports and physical education under Spain,

Puerto Ricans welcomed a new system. The YMCA entered Puerto Rico in 1899 as part of the U.S. Army and Navy to provide religious, moral, and recreational support to the soldiers and civil society. The “Army and Navy YMCA” set an example of the importance of sports and recreation for physical and spiritual well-being. U.S. federal and local colonial authorities also sponsored athletics and physical education through the overhaul of the public education system and the establishment of the University of Puerto Rico in 1903. By hosting the Tenth Central American and Caribbean Games in San Juan in 1966, Puerto Ricans consolidated their sport culture and its relation to international politics with the development of a national identity.

The focus of this story is the twentieth century, roughly from 1898 to 1966, although some events in 1980 and 2010 are discussed in the last chapter. I have chosen to end the story in 1966 because this year marks the climax of Puerto Rico’s Olympic trajectory. The problems of being recognized as a legitimate Olympic nation had been, for the most part, clarified by this time. By hosting the Central American and Caribbean Games of 1966, their first ever mega-sporting international event, Puerto Ricans tested their infrastructural and programmatic Olympic capabilities. The problems faced at the 1966 Games, mainly dependence on the United States to set foreign political policy in relation to communist Cuba, continued in the decades that followed until the present. The negotiations and dilemmas of Olympic politics as seen in the 1980 Olympic Boycott (although here the Puerto Rican Olympic Committee did go against the boycott and participated in the Games) and in the 1993 and 2010 Central American and Caribbean Games are reminiscent of the experiences of 1966. After 1966 Puerto Rican Olympism shows the continuation of political negotiations and clashes between the pro-statehood and pro-commonwealth groups and the small but vocal pro-independence groups.

Although I am aware of the problems of periodization in history, I trace the development of sport across five loosely conceptualized political periods: (1) the late nineteenth century and the end

of Spanish colonialism; (2) the early negotiations over U.S. colonialism and its Americanization policies from 1898 through the 1920s; (3) the instability of the 1930s and the definition of national identity; (4) the PPD’s populism of the 1940s; and (5) the evaluation of autonomy and the commonwealth after 1952. This division of Puerto Rican history also correlates to international political events: the first period corresponds to the emergence of the United States as an imperial power that covers the Spanish American War of 1898, the Good Neighbor policy of the post-Depression 1930s, World War II and the near postwar years, the waves of decolonization of the late 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, and the cold war.³⁷

At the center of this book is a wide range of interrelated governmental and private agencies that together contributed to the framework of Puerto Rican colonialism and national identity. These institutions, created under the banner of progress and modernization, actually served the dual purpose of identity formation and colonial consent. These included the YMCA, the public education system, the University of Puerto Rico, the Puerto Rican Legislature, the governor of Puerto Rico, the sport and recreation government agencies, and the Puerto Rican Olympic Committee. In the search for Puerto Rican political and cultural autonomy, these institutions morphed, grew, and sometimes disappeared only to surface again, eventually consolidating to create a healthy, educated, and progressive citizenry.

While studying institutions is elemental in dissecting the development of sport and Olympism in Puerto Rico, they are ultimately meaningless if we do not analyze the individuals commanding them. Leading these government agencies were central figures in politics, education, and sports, both elite and nonelite, who together gave meaning to Puerto Rico’s colonial Olympism. Central among them was Julio Enrique Monagas, a figure perplexingly nonexistent in Puerto Rican historiography. Monagas played a crucial role in the development of local sport in Puerto Rico through his sports and recreation agencies and as head of the Comité Olímpico de Puerto

Rico (COPR) and an ally of the populist hegemonic project of the PPD. Monagas's role in the politics of sport and nation building in Puerto Rico actually transcended insular politics. His international credence and presidency over the Central American and Caribbean Sport Organization (CACSO) was a significant accomplishment.

Indeed Monagas was one of the PPD's key contributors to Puerto Rico's dramatic modernization, which became an example to the developing world.³⁸ My analysis of Monagas contributes to the idea that for all the charisma, dynamism, and strong leadership of Luis Muñoz Marín (Puerto Rico's twentieth-century political *caudillo*), there were key figures whose loyalty, intelligence, cleverness, and drive were indispensable to the success of the PPD's reforms.³⁹ These include Teodoro Moscoso and Operation Bootstrap, Jaime Benítez and the Universidad de Puerto Rico, Ricardo Alegría and the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, Rafael Picó as chairman of the Puerto Rico Planning Board and president of the Government Development Bank, Secretary of State Roberto Sánchez Vilella, and Antonio Fernós Isern and his ideological basis to establish the commonwealth.⁴⁰ Monagas deserves a place in this team of political, economic, and cultural leaders who, working within the parameters of U.S. imperialism, created a pro-American populist colonial state.⁴¹

Most of these men coincided almost exactly in their tenure as head of their respective institutions during the heyday of PPD hegemony. Monagas served as commissioner and administrator of sports and recreation from 1942 to 1966, and Jaime Benítez served as chancellor of the UPR from 1942 to 1966. Rafael Picó served as chairman of Puerto Rico Planning from 1942 to 1955, as treasurer of Puerto Rico from 1955 to 1958, and as president of the Government Development Bank from 1958 to 1964. Teodoro Moscoso served as president of the Puerto Rican Industrial Development Company from 1942 to 1950, as administrator of the Economic Development Administration from 1950 to 1961, as U.S. ambassador to Venezuela in 1961–62, and as coordinator for the Alliance for Progress from 1962 to 1964.

Puerto Rican modernization aimed at fulfilling the needs of a colonial nation. Modernization comprised a project of political dignity and economic industrialization that lifted Puerto Ricans from centuries of colonial exploitation, without necessarily abandoning a special relationship with the metropole. In this regard, despite the creation in 1952 of a seemingly autonomous status (commonwealth, or Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico) and the establishment of an economic industrialization program (Operation Bootstrap) that lifted Puerto Ricans from poverty, Puerto Rican modernization actually consolidated colonialism and increased economic dependence within the U.S. economic system.⁴²

Although modernization is usually discussed in terms of economic, social, and political policies of industrialization, institutionalization, urbanization, and political consolidation, the development of Puerto Rico's Olympic movement occurred as part of these politico-economic and infrastructural changes in relation to cultural activities. Cultural studies examines the traditions, practices, and beliefs of a group or community that provides entertainment and leisure but also shows its uniqueness and cultivates a sense of identity.⁴³ In this regard, I am distancing myself from the highly criticized modernization theory with a one-style development model for the "Third World" in order to "catch up" with the world's industrial centers. I am also distancing myself from the often inconclusive and elusive concept of modernity.⁴⁴ Instead I use modernization not as a global model of development but as a series of fundamental reforms by and for a particular society that sought to increase standards of living. For Puerto Ricans, modernization, or progress, entailed the creation of an industrial society following a populist and social justice program, with a degree of autonomy.

Monagas was not alone in the task of sport development and leadership. Other major players were no less influential; they include Zerah Collins, William Coxhead, George Keelan, Cosme Beitía, Justo Rivera Cabrera, Eugenio Guerra, Teófilo Maldonado, Luis Guillerm-

ety, Emilio Huyke, and Germán Rieckehoff Sampayo. Not all of these individuals agreed on the purpose, shape, or goals of Puerto Rican sports and Olympism, but each of them left an enduring mark on Puerto Rican colonial Olympism. Sport policies did not occur in a leadership vacuum or separate from the political, economic, or social issues. These policies were designed, enacted, and enforced by different individuals representing different ideologies and interests that ranged from full Americanization to Olympic and political sovereignty. Athletes and the masses also had varying reasons to partake in and follow Olympic activities. Some athletes believed they were representing a nascent Puerto Rican nation; some just wanted to compete against other good athletes and were clearly detached from political ideologies. Developing Olympism in Puerto Rico was a process characterized by multiple meanings, not always dictated from the top of the colonial venture but defined by multiple actors from different segments of society.

While the present story focuses on Puerto Rico, parallel developments are cited. As a Latin American nation, Puerto Rico shares with its neighboring Latin American countries a history of Iberian colonization, encounters of diverse ethnicities, similar cultural and political traditions and socioeconomic concerns, and U.S. interventions.⁴⁵ As eloquently put by Antonio Benítez-Rojo in *The Repeating Island*, as a Caribbean nation Puerto Rico also has a history multicultural Atlantic cultural chaos and polyrhythms characteristic of the Plantation society.⁴⁶ Yet as Franklin Knight explains, the island's history also shows the particular local processes of nation within larger Caribbean national identities.⁴⁷ We must understand as well identities in both a geopolitical and a “geohistorical” sense.⁴⁸ That is to say, European colonization patterns and imperial wars in the Caribbean, including that of the United States, have shaped the construction of national identities in the region. Varying degrees of forced African immigration, European immigration, a sugar plantation economy, and militarized societies

have caused the Caribbean islands to have similar national characteristics. Nonetheless I agree with Stephan Palmié and Francisco Scarano, who state that the history of the Caribbean ought not to be understood as a byproduct of empires and migrant civilizations that fought for and lived in the region, but as its own area full of similarities and differences, all centered on the societies that inhabit it.⁴⁹ To understand Puerto Rico is also to understand Latin America and especially the Caribbean. Even though the particular contexts of these societies may be very different, the political, social, and cultural processes, including sport and Olympism, are fairly similar.⁵⁰ Examination of the institutions and people that regulated, supervised, controlled, scrutinized, and reacted to sport in Puerto Rico will shed light on other places.

Sport and History

Amy Bass, writing for an American academic audience, has cleverly framed the suitability of sport as a window to understand history:

The possibilities are vast, and much is demanded of the sports historian. Sport is a commercial industry that deals with concepts of labor and capitalism, often within the landscape of urban studies; a cultural realm that takes in the politics of media and spectacle, constructing and contesting identities such as gender, race, and sexuality, class, religion, ethnicity, and nationality (and their multiple combinations); a scientific domain with focal points on the psyche of both athlete and spectator, as well as the physical achievements of humans on any given playing field; and an arena for foreign policy and cultural diplomacy.⁵¹

The historical study of sport does not view sport as representative of society but as forming an integral part of it. Sport in modern societies has become an inescapable variable in the study of the human experience in all its complexities. Leaving it aside as a mundane