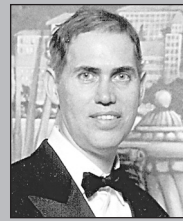


# The French Connection: Haiti and Vieques

As a result of the Revolution of 1791-1804 in the French colony of Saint Domingue, which then changed its name to Haiti, many white and mulatto planters fled to Louisiana and Puerto Rico. These "French" planters constituted an important segment of the planter class that flourished in Puerto Rico after the Haitian revolution shut down the principal sugar producer of the Caribbean. In the municipality of Ponce, for example, the largest group of "foreign" planters were the French.

The establishment of foreign planters, and especially the French, in Puerto Rico, was assisted by a royal edict of 1815 called *Cédula*



José L. Bolívar  
Commentary

de Gracias, that permitted the settlement of non-Spanish individuals, so long as they were of the Catholic religion. This edict granted special tax exemptions on the importation of equipment for sugar mills and slaves, and was aimed

at restoring the productive capacity of Puerto Rico and reintegrating it into the Spanish orbit. In the 18th century, the dominant contraband trade with the British and French had practically pulled Puerto Rico from the sphere of Spanish power in economic terms. Indeed, the main finding of Marshall Alejandro O'Reilly in his famous memoir of 1765 had been the extent of the contraband trade and the lack of loyalty of the residents of Puerto Rico to the trading restrictions imposed by the Spanish Crown.

Thus, in the last quarter of the 18th century, and especially in the first quarter of the 19th, when the Spanish were losing their conti-

mental empire to the independence movements of the Spanish colonies, the Crown made special efforts to integrate the two remaining loyal colonies: Cuba and Puerto Rico. Settlement by friendly colonists of the Catholic religion was meant to boost the economies of the islands.

The settlement of Vieques was given a boost by an enterprising Frenchman by the name of Teophile Jaime José María Le Guillou, who is considered the "founder" of Vieques. Born on May 4, 1790 in Quemperle, a region in the north of France, Le Guillou originally came to Vieques to purchase lumber. He established himself in Vieques and during the following 20 years amassed wealth and polit-

ical power to an extent never before seen on the island. The town of Isabel Segunda was established on lands he donated. Le Guillou was appointed Military and Political Governor of Vieques during its formative years, and occupied this position from 1832 until his death in 1843. The "French Connection" established by Le Guillou contributed to the creation of a colony of French landowners that dominated the sugar industry during the remainder of the 19th century.

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## VOICES

### Good luck with your new birth certificates

I read the Daily Sun story on Feb. 28 about the replacement of all Puerto Rican birth certificates with great interest. A birth certificate is one document that is normally kept in a drawer, in a dresser, or if you have a desk, in a personal file folder for important papers.

Often, as happened to me, the birth certificate becomes torn and tattered, or faded, and must be replaced for one reason or another. I can vouch for having a birth certificate handy. When I entered the U.S. Air Force I did not have a copy when I went to the recruiter's office. I needed to put my full legal name on the form, so I called my mom from the office to ask her my exact name as it appeared on the certificate. She did not have a copy, but told me my name was Jesús David Aragon.

Never had I used that name, as I was Jesse. But, I put it on all the official documents. In my fourth week of basic training, my birth certificate arrived and it read "Jesse David Aragon," but alas, it was too late. I was officially Jesús and my basic training sergeant never failed to let me know as he hollered at me, "So, you think you're Jesus! Well, Jesus, I am your God so get on the ground and give me 50 push-ups!"

So I have gone these past several decades living a double identity, Jesse to my friends and family and Jesus on my military and Veterans Administration records. I wish the four million Puerto Ricans living here and the 1.5 million living in the states good luck in getting their new, correct birth certificates.

*J. D. Aragon, Old San Juan  
Feb. 28*

### Our daily news

We were disappointed to learn recently of the disappearance of \$16 million intended to help workers and businesses displaced by the 2004 closing of Roosevelt Roads, the U.S. Naval Base in eastern Puerto Rico. It is safe to say, though, the news hardly shocked anyone who has become a veteran if not an addict of daily reports on the extraordinary behaviors of the government, particularly its ability to mimic the Black Holes in outer space which can ingest objects like stars and star dust, comets, overdue books and overdue book reports, and that quite substantial \$16 million, and do so without so much as a hiccup or the hint of heartburn, and nary a regret. And with no one, absolutely no one, any the wiser.

But was this loss the bad news of the day, or the good news — only \$16 million missing? Our faith in humankind should be affirmed by our realization that

some officials at least had the decency (a refreshing sense of shame?) to admit they knew for sure that wealth was gone forever. It shows, don't you think, a certain respect by the Puerto Rican government for the conventions of modern democracy, a certain ambition to remain in touch with the people, even if it is only to let us know, "Sorry, folks, we screwed up again!"

And who are some of the people the government would be especially interested in informing of such recurring, self-created disasters, besides family and friends and fans, colleagues and rivals, local and federal taxpayers? The intended audience would surely have to include the class of people who read newspapers — the vast majority of island residents — people who believe they are entitled to printed reports about their government's deeds and misdeeds and miscellaneous, sundry expense.

It is this reality, constructed by our expectations for knowledge as a birthright, that is proving so difficult for the Big Pumpkin in Venezuela to overcome as he moves to silence not just his political opponents, but everyone with historically grounded expectations of freedoms that are blatantly at odds with his relentlessly homogenizing, simplifying, cleansing ideals. In the environment of Hugo Chávez, would you have the opportunity of even considering the question: Which kind of news are you finding more compelling these days, dear reader — that the government had in hand \$16 million, or that the same \$16 million cannot be accounted for?

Regrettably, the natural tendency of vast sums of money to disappear on planet Puerto Rico shows no signs of abating. Former Governor Sila Calderón (2001-2005) is crying out today that the \$1 billion she had reserved for her Special Communities Project has utterly vanished.

"What? Egad, no! No, it can't be! A billion gone?" I'm afraid so, and what's worse, no one knows how, no one knows where, into the thin air of memory, the pure bull--- of political rhetoric, or into substantial real estate holdings, discrete offshore accounts, prodigious re-election campaigns. Who knows — we don't even know if anyone has been officially assigned yet to know, "the designated knower."

The most likely suspect to have absorbed Sila's fabulous billion is not a human villain, of course, but the deficit the dear woman helped to justify and increase by rehiring tens of thousands of government workers terminated by her dreaded and much despised predecessor in his eight-year effort to cut the operational costs of "doing government" in Puerto Rico (Pedro Rosselló, 1993-2001).

Calderon should realize that you simply cannot, in this day and age, run up an operational deficit that is fast approaching a billion dollars by the time you

decide to check out of office, for "personal" reasons, and at the same time claim to have found, out of the goodness of your heart and the taxed income of your serfs, a billion dollars for Special Communities, and expect rational people to believe you — not unless you're operating under the influence of Puerto Rico, and expect everybody else to dumb down accordingly.

In that case, and with important people all on the same page of collaboration, a new administration can, without thinking much at all, merely by continuing to do the same old things as before (Aníbal Acevedo Vila, 2005-2009), allow the deficit to balloon, to swell to \$3.2 billion, waiting, just waiting to explode. As for the \$1 billion canary that was supposed to feather nests for the poor in Special Communities, well, it's probably been consumed by ...

"Hey, hey! Who ate the birdie?"

Golly, I really can't help you out here. Have you tried therapy?

Maybe it's all for the best. If the Special Communities had been allowed to take effect, half the island would have qualified for individual dwellings in autonomous, self-regulating communities. Those are the sorts of communities that typically display the Puerto Rican national flag and demand federal funding as a necessary condition of their autonomy. Where else could the funding come from, unless by way of more deficit spending by socialist administrations out of touch with developments in post-modern socialism?

The start-up costs of those communities would be tolerable, however, if the people living there were expected eventually to do more than consume resources and cultivate resentment. They should be enabled to fulfill their social obligations according to the plans of someone like the remarkable, effective Mayor of Caguas "Willy" Miranda Marín. The entire economy of Puerto Rico is to be transformed from job creation — dig a hole, fill the hole in, make the boss happy — to vital, expansive entrepreneurship-market the world-class *sopas* of Puerto Rico, for example, to supermarkets above the frost-line of the northern hemisphere where depressed, anxiety-ridden people, prematurely aged from a lack of sunlight and the touch of lightly salted aquamarine surf on their bodies, also suffer from a diet completely lacking in the nutrients of calabash and the remarkable root vegetables of the Caribbean whose medicinal properties are just awaiting analysis and evaluation through the cutting-edge sciences and technologies starting up at the University of Puerto Rico.

That's what we'd like to hear more about in the news, not the SOS issued by the government practically on a daily basis, "Same Old Sugar!"

*Steven Greenia, Río Piedras  
March 1*