

Selecciones
de la obra de
Federico Degetau

Original

Statehood for Porto Rico.

Remarks made by Hon. Federico Degetau, at the banquet offered to the Hon. William J. Bryan at San Juan, Porto Rico, on April 9, 1910.

In compliance with the kind invitation of the toastmaster, I am glad to express my satisfaction in hearing Governor Colton to refer, as he did, to the Pan American University, joining himself to the aspirations rooted in the highest needs of our country.

"..... I do not belong to any of the local parties because I believe in the need of an immediate organization of Porto Rico as a state of the American Union, that is, I believe in Statehood as an immediate exigency of the day, of the present moment, as a guarantee of to-day for the economic and political interest of Porto Rico. Equally do I believe that the United States needs to make a State of Porto Rico, in order to carry out its economic and political policy, specially in its relations with respect to the rest of the American continent. The idea of Statehood for Porto Rico, up to now, only appeared upon our political horizon as an aspiration for the future, as a subject for academical discussion and both optimist and pessimist in Porto Rico, because they hold this view of Statehood, refrain from struggling for this principle as a principle of immediate realization.

As for the politics of the Continental section of the United States, I am neither a Republican nor a Democrat. A struggle here

over a Jeffersonaian interpretation of the Constitution appears to me as premature and unjustifiable as the discussion of Statehood appears to many of our statesmen of the Island and of the Continent.

The great political parties originated by Jefferson and by Hamilton seem to me the two wings of the American Eagle.

Nevertheless, it must not be thought that such a state of affairs can long endure. I do not believe that the moment is far distant when public opinion in the Island will clearly see the necessity of a definite policy for the defense and stability of its local interests, both political and economic. And with equal clearness will it see that it is the duty of our people to awaken the public conscience on the other side of the Gulf Stream to the attempted treason against humanity in the wresting away from a country of a million souls the privilege enjoyed from the dawn of constitutional life; that of full participation in the direction and government of their common interests.

The formation of Porto Rico into a State is a political factor equally important to our local interests and to the economical and political interests of the United States.

The glorious mission that awaits this Island does not depend, thank God, nor can it depend, upon our present near-sighted local policy, nor upon the blindness or lack of actual information of the statesmen of the Continent. The glorious mission that is reserved to Porto Rico was written with eternal characters by

Nature when she determined our geographical position, by the Creator when He determined our historical significance.

The two races of the hemisphere have, gentlemen, a common duty to fulfill. The realization of this duty in moments of anguish for the human spirit led to the proclamation of the Monroe doctrine, and thus the people of the United States made a compact with civilization that they would be powerless to observe without the intelligent and enthusiastic cooperation of the inhabitants of the Southern half of the Continent. Otherwise what is really a common and holy cause would become a viciating and degrading tutelage.

.....

When I picture the possibility of a federative organization of the Republics of our hemisphere, I think that when it becomes a reality, Porto Rico must serve as a sort of District of Columbia, the neutral zone where the government of the Federation of the Western Hemisphere may be carried on.

And we have not lost sight of the demands of the present; the political reality of to-day comes from the fulfillments of the dreams of passed generations, from the dreamers of the Roman Capitoline, to the dreamers of the Convention of Philadelphia, the human needs of the moment speak constantly and in many ways of this glorious mission of our fatherland.

.....

One of the greatest blessings of humanity, gentlemen, is that of its limitations. No man can live happily and alone. The greater and more powerful he is, the more he needs others in his life. The larger the tree is that spreads its mighty branches over the plain, the more water it needs from the earth to increase its sap, the more light to color its leaves and enamel its flowers, the more beings desirous of food, to disseminate its fruits.

Even from the narrowest point of view this law is fulfilled. However vast the territory of a State may be, God so drew the form of the earth, that man cannot surround himself by an impregnable Chinese wall, either for the material defense of his live or for the accomplishment of natural ends. In our case Porto Rico is as essential a part of the United States from the strategic point of view as it is from an economical or political one. As for the first link of union stablished by the common defense, it is sufficient to consider how seriously the Eastern coast of the United States would be threatened if Porto Rico should fall into the hands of a strong naval power.

From an economic point of view Porto Rico and the United States are no less necessary to each other. The United States forms the natural market for the insular products and he would be blind indeed who do not see that the commerce of the American Union needs a Southern outlet for its immense overproduction, the industrial congestion of which would result in a tremendous crisis.

Each blow of the pickaxe that falls in the Isthmus for the opening of a new commercial route to the world is a blow that should awaken the thoughtful far-sighted men of the United States of America to this truth that is as clear as the light of the tropical sky that inspires it.

And in spite of our regional modesty, this is not the first time that the light of the Tropics illuminates the political horizon of the United States in solemn moments, in the great crisis of its portentous growth.

During the first days of American Independence, an Antilean, Hamilton, the first constructive genius of the new hemisphere, who inherited the thought of Aristotle through the Latin mind of Montesquieu, declared in a Constitution the sovereignty of the people and the political liberty, organized a government of limited powers and separate functions, and distinguished the idea of government and of State. This distinction was discovered in our day by Professor Burgess, thus establishing the justice and assuring for that generation and for posterity the greatest blessing that the mind can conceive.

We are the direct inheritors of the race that in Rome gave the world citizenship, faith and civil law; in Genoa the nautical brain that could trace over the seas the route for finding the continent so indispensable to the equilibrium of this hemisphere; and in Spain the hearts to understand and follow Columbus. Have we then, in the Antilles spent this creative energy?

Historically this loved fatherland of ours is as much predestined to fulfill a glorious end as were the Greek islands, in the Mediterranean sea, predestined to disseminate through the Western world the basic foundations of our modern civilization. And this is an eloquent fact that the past teaches us, in spite of those in the United States who are so blind-minded as to adopt "No Insular States" as a motto. The systematic negation of the Insular States is formulated in the English language, in the language of the Insular State that created with its blood and its language the English Colonies before whose cradle as a State Spanish noblemen offered their doubloons and French captains the steel blades of their swords.

The people of Porto Rico, gentlemen, are a people of bloodless history, faithfully symbolized by the lamb on their shield. They believe that their greatest title to human respect is the fact that they have developed their country without darkening their sky with a single cloud of hate, or shedding tears of blood on their fertile soil.

Porto Rico, gentlemen, prepared by such a history, has been formed by Providence as an ideal throne for the constructive labors of peace, which the future imposes upon us all, in just homage for the benefits of the past and Nature's abundant gifts to this detached piece of the American Continent.

But to understand how our people are capable of conceiving and realizing such lofty aims, it is necessary to rectify an error

made by many of those who visit us from the United States. It is the supposition that there is great inequality here between the men who have received a University education, or a broad general culture, and the great mass of the people, who because of deceitful appearance, is supposed to be in a state of pitiful ignorance and subjection.

This mistake is flattery and censure at the same time for those of us who have received a university education. The flattery ought not to be very great, because we can scarcely envy the unhappy Porto Rican who would swell with complacency at the idea of his personal merits appearing to foreigners as the result of the needs and deficiencies of his own countrymen.

Rather should we fear the censure that may come to us for having accepted an egoistic enjoyment of life, by our own carelessness or wickedness establishing so great an inequality between ourselves and the masses of the people.

And this censure is so much the more to be feared as those to whom this difference would most impress are precisely the best and most altruistic among our visitors.

We Porto Ricans and Americans have mutual need of one another in our common struggling for the good of humanity.

The affection felt for our country by the thoughtful men of the continent and the sense of justice dominant there, convinced me that the organization of our country as a State will be for us an easier task, and one more close by at hand, than it

is today believed, either here or in the United States. The organization will come as soon as public opinion here realizes the danger to our interests in the present political instability in Porto Rico, and as soon as public opinion in the North, realizes the true idea of the Pan-american mission imposed upon the United States. For I repeat that this mission cannot be rightfully fulfilled ~~if~~, in the bosom of the American Union, not as a stolen captive Sabine of the Modern Rome, but as one of the States of that sisterhood of States, the people of Porto Rico blessed by God with the privilege of being able to explain with her act and words to the remaining part of the hemisphere, and to the rest of the world, the ideal political organization statuted in English with the majestical drapery of the Spanish language.