

# PUERTO RICAN RECORDS in the NATIONAL ARCHIVES at NEW YORK CITY



Top center: Aerial photo of San Juan, San Juan Engineer's Office, RG77 Office of the Chief of Engineers; Top: Consular ID card, U.S. District Court for Puerto Rico, RG23 U.S. District Courts; Center: Needlework sample, RG9 National Recovery Administration; Bottom: Parcel land survey, Caribbean National Forest, RG95 U.S. Forest Service.

## SO WHAT?

The National Archives (NARA) in New York City promotes itself as the repository for Federal records created by agencies located in New York, New Jersey, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. However, the records from Puerto Rico are often overlooked and underutilized. The foundational concept for this project was based on the premise that every repository has unknown and/or un(der)used collections and the philosophy that archives should not be passive, simply waiting to be used. Rather, staff should get out from behind the stacks and reference desk and actively promote the materials in their care. New York City is home to the largest population of Puerto Ricans outside the island itself, and thus lack of use should not be interpreted as a lack of an audience. The objective of this project was to develop tools and strategies to promote the use of the materials from Puerto Rico. The materials document the Federal government's often complicated relationship with Puerto Rico, reveal its reach within Puerto Rican society, and provide important insight into the collective understanding of both Puerto Rican history and the larger American experience.

## DESCRIPTION CHALLENGE

The project centered on developing a topical research guide to Puerto Rican records held by NARA New York which span 27 record groups and comprise over 2,750 linear feet, as well as six microfilm series. Development of a topical guide was seen as a first step in raising awareness about the existence of these records and in promoting their use by a traditionally underserved community. The guide that emerged is the result of a general survey of the records and a hodge-podge of associated paperwork which included prior attempts at description, 50-plus year old preliminary inventories, accession paperwork, and ad hoc box lists. These were augmented by more in-depth surveys on select record groups and research in secondary sources to present a better understanding of the content and administrative history of the records. It was also decided to include links to records related to Puerto Rico held at other NARA locations, as well as non-NARA repositories, in an effort to connect related materials held elsewhere. More concise handouts and pamphlets have been designed to appeal to family historians, a core patron base of the National Archives. A pilot project has also begun to add item level description and digital images to the National Archives online research catalogue, as well as other box, folder, and item level descriptive tools.

## OUTREACH & ADVOCACY

Concurrently, several outreach initiatives were undertaken to help promote these materials to a wider audience. Webinars were conducted to NARA-wide staff, as part of their reference colloquium series, and presentations were given to Latin American subject librarians and Puerto Rican community organizations that partner with the Census Bureau. A useful dialogue has begun with the archives of El Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños and El Museo del Barrio, both located in New York City, regarding possible areas of collaboration. Planned presentations include the annual conference of the Puerto Rican Studies Association and a webinar for Puerto Rico based institutions and researchers. Also in development is a program to be aired on East Harlem TV, a local community-focused cable television program. Web-based outreach has included a series of Facebook posts and the development of a prototype web exhibit on citizenship and Puerto Rico as reflected in the records held by NARA New York. A future Web 2.0 project that is under consideration is to use the Historypin platform to highlight the extensive photograph collection from the 1930s and 1940s that is spread across multiple record groups.



Top: Property tax ledger, San Juan Naval Station, RG181 Naval Establishments and Districts; Center: Photo of cattle de-loading station, RG22 Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration; Bottom: Menu card with the Gasparita rationing board, RG188 Office of Price Administration; Bottom Center: Blueprint, San Juan Naval Station, RG181 Naval Establishments and Districts.