

Puerto Rico's and the
United Nations, A Preliminary
Bibliography of United Nations
Documents and Speeches
Addressing Puerto Rico's
Political Status, 1953-2025

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About this Report

This report provides a preliminary bibliographical overview of all United Nations documents and speeches addressing various dimensions of Puerto Rico's political status. This research bibliography is meant to introduce readers to the study of Puerto Rico's political status debates in the United Nations. Our intention is to update this bibliography every fall and continue to expand or add more materials as they are released and as we find them. Materials for this project are available at the United Nations Dag Hammarskjöld Library. This report is part of the Puerto Rico Status Archives Project (<https://archive.puerto-rican-studies-initiative.clas.uconn.edu/>)

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The United States annexed Puerto Rico and other Spanish ultramarine territories during the Spanish-American War of 1898 and under the terms of the *Treaty of Paris of 1898*. This annexation departed from prior traditions of United States (U.S.) territorial expansionism. The federal government developed two traditions of territorial expansionism between the founding and 1898, namely a colonialist and an imperialist. Territories subject to colonization were settled or colonized and subsequently admitted into the Union as states on an equal footing with the original thirteen. Prior to 1898, the United States annexed sufficient territory to admit thirty-seven new states. Simultaneously, advocates of U.S. imperialism strategically *occupied* territories for economic and/or military purposes. Occupied territories were treated as foreign possessions and were not placed on a path to statehood. Following the Spanish-American War, U.S. law and policymakers invented a new tradition of territorial expansionism to rule Puerto Rico and the other Spanish ultramarine territories.

Also known as the “Third View,” the “doctrine of separate and unequal” and/or the doctrine of “territorial incorporation,” the new U.S. tradition of territorial expansion enabled the federal government to selectively govern *annexed* territories as foreign possessions for domestic or constitutional purposes, but also as domestic possessions or international interests. The new tradition of territorial expansionism was first introduced by the Department of War, normalized by the *Foraker Act of 1900* and subsequently given constitutional legitimacy by the Supreme Court in a series of rulings generally known as the *Insular Cases*. Under the new tradition of territorial expansionism, annexed territories like Puerto Rico were described as unincorporated territories.

Since 1900, Congress has amended the *Foraker Act* on multiple occasions, but it has never changed Puerto Rico’s territorial status. For example, in 1917, Congress enacted the *Jones Act* which provided for the collective naturalization of Puerto Ricans. But this amendment did not incorporate Puerto Rico, even though the majority of the residents of the islands became U.S. citizens. In 1952 Congress further amended the *Foraker Act* to allow Puerto Ricans to create a local constitution to govern and administer Puerto Rico’s local affairs without incorporating or changing Puerto Rico’s territorial status. Notwithstanding, neither Congress nor the Supreme Court have changed Puerto Rico’s territorial status since 1900. For more than a century, Puerto Rico has been ruled as an unincorporated territory.

Following the enactment of the Puerto Rican constitution, and at the behest of both the Puerto Rican and U.S. governments, the United Nations selectively began to describe Puerto Rico as an autonomous territory. More specifically, the United Nations (U.N.) stopped describing Puerto Rico as a colonial possession or non-self-governing territory for purposes of its Special Committee on Decolonization, even though Congress and the Supreme Court had not changed Puerto Rico’s unincorporated territorial status.

This research bibliography collects citations of U.N. documents and speeches addressing different dimensions of Puerto Rico’s territorial and political status. Our goal is to provide

researchers with a list of key documents that can better help understand how Puerto Rico's political status has been debated in the United Nations. The list of citations was initially developed by the staff of the United Nations Dag Hammarskjöld Library and subsequently edited by the authors of this report. This is not the most comprehensive collection of citations, but it is a start. Our goal is to update this list on a yearly basis by adding materials from various repositories. All materials can be accessed through the United Nations Dag Hammarskjöld Library.

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