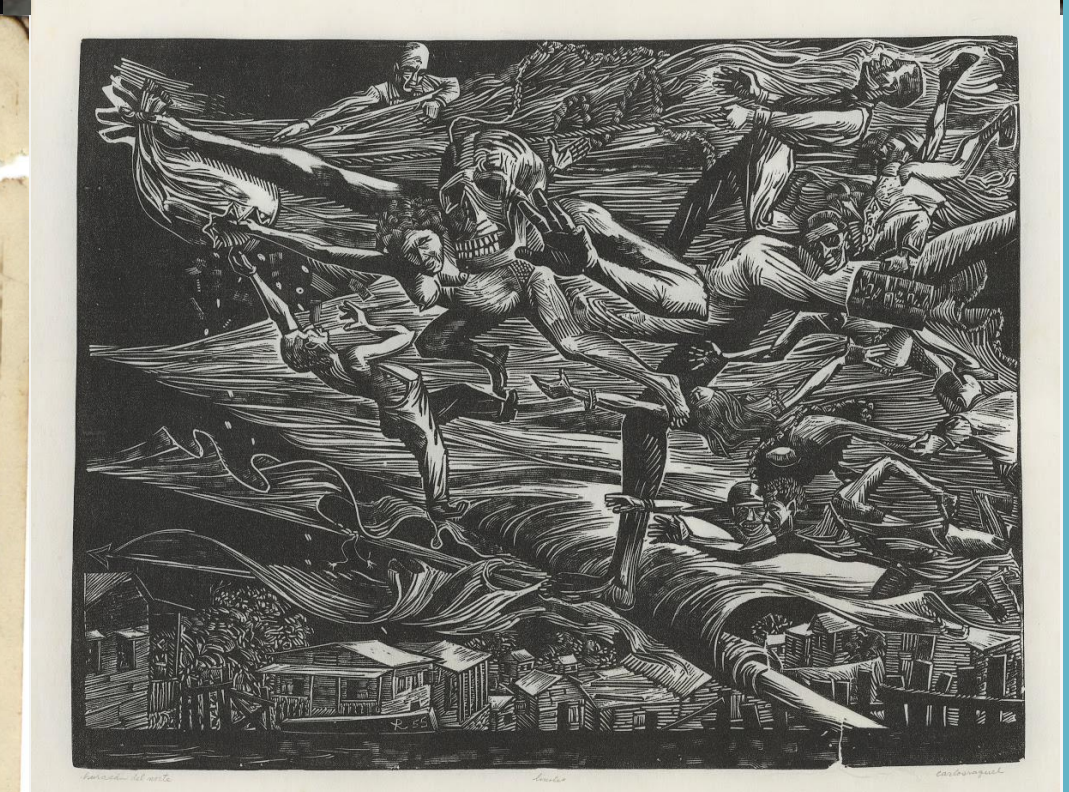


**COMMONWEALTH OF
CALAMITY: LEARNING
FROM PUERTO RICO'S
DISASTER HISTORY**

**BY IAN SEAVEY
YALE UNIVERSITY**

JACKSON SCHOOL OF GLOBAL AFFAIRS



OUTLINE

- **Historians' role in understanding disasters**
- **Discuss Case Studies of Hurricane San Ciriaco 1899 and Hurricane Santa Clara 1956**
- **Hallmarks of U.S. Disaster Relief**
- **FEMA and the Modern Debt Crisis**
- **Decolonizing Disaster as the Way Forward**

WHAT DO HISTORIANS DO?

- Archival research
- Present and interpret history in order to inform or build upon public knowledge of past events
- Oral Histories
- Digital Humanities
- Create new ways of knowing

AGPR-11
REV. MARZO 2011

21-Julio

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ARCHIVO GENERAL DE PUERTO RICO
SALA DE ESTUDIO Y REFERENCIA
PEDIDO DE DOCUMENTOS

FONDO _____
SUBFONDO _____
SERIE _____
CAJA(S) _____
LEGAJO _____ EXP. _____

274

Tom Soberon
SOLICITANTE

19-Julio-2011
FECHA DE SOLICITUD

J. Chao
SERVIDO POR

SÁBADO

VENCE Cita-Jueves, 22 Julio

2

COMUNICACION LUIS MUÑOZ MARIN
PUERTO RICO

Archivo Luis Muñoz Marín

Sección ...V...LMM..Gobernador...de..P..R.

Serie1....Correspondencia...Particular...
general

Sub - Serie ..II...PRES....L....B....Johnson
III. Pres. H. S. Truman

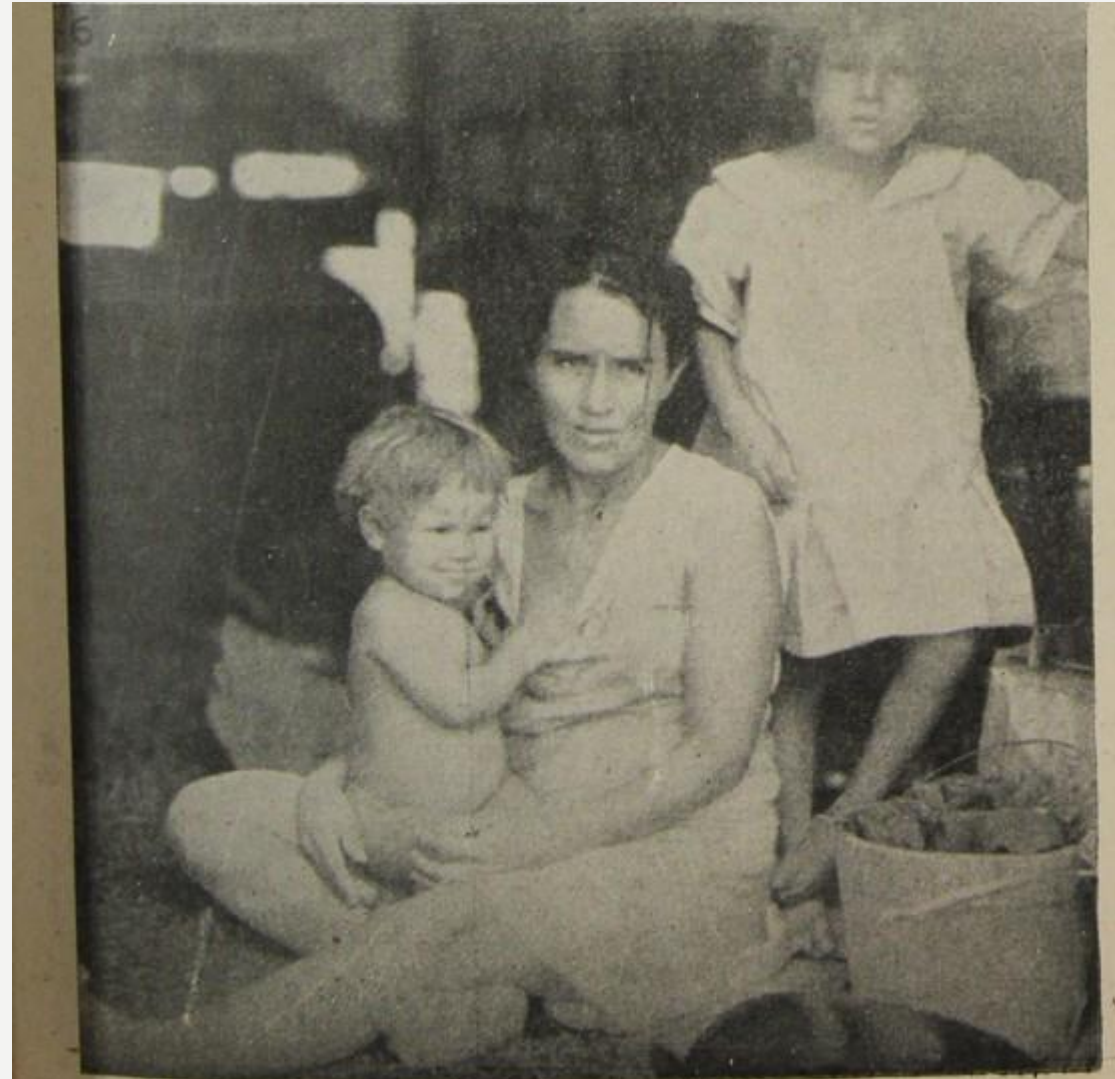
Años

Cartapacios16 - 30.....

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NO SUCH THING AS A NATURAL DISASTER

- “Disaster” is an analytical construct that unfolds over time not an isolated event
- Viewing hurricanes in this way emphasizes the underlying structural conditions
- Critical disaster studies



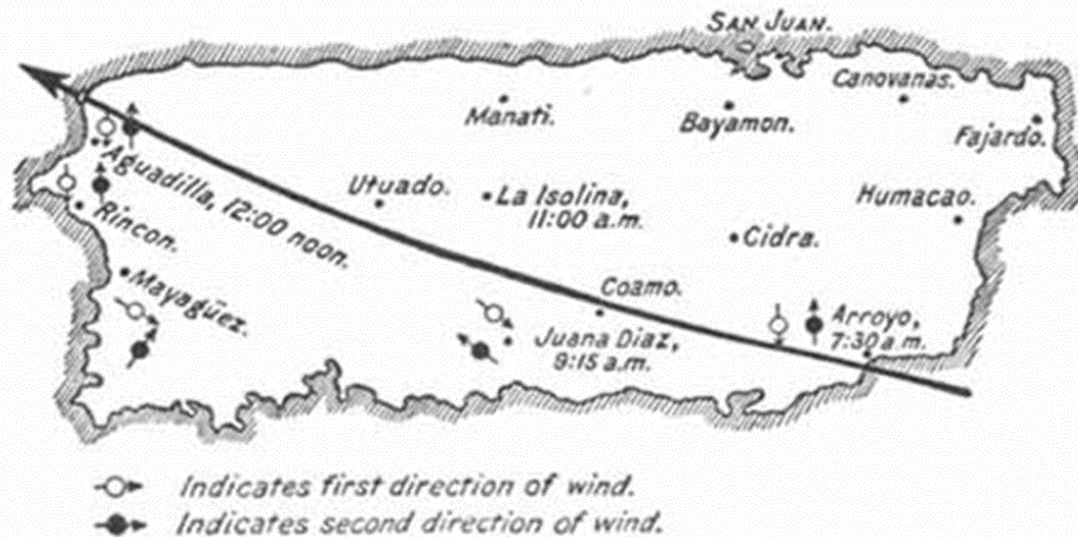
CHANGE IN PUERTO RICAN SOVEREIGNTY

- **U.S. acquires Puerto Rico from Spain in the Treaty of Paris 1898**
- **U.S. Army invades and occupies 1898-1900**



HURRICANE SAN CIRIACO 1899

- 3,400 Deaths
- \$20 million property damage
- Entire coffee crop destroyed



U.S. ARMY RELIEF EFFORTS

- **Brigadier General George Davis had no standing orders on how to handle hurricane relief**
- **Organized relief operations from the top down**
- **Partnered with local elites**
- **Only those who buried the dead would be fed**



POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND SOCIAL PRECEDENTS ESTABLISHED

- Unilaterally changed Puerto Rico's economy
- Hallmarks of American disaster relief
- Foraker Act 1900



MUÑOZ MARÍN, MOSCOSO, TRUMAN, EISENHOWER AND SOVEREIGNTY

- Rise of the PPD and initial Success of Operation Bootstrap
- Creation of Estado Libre Asociado 1952
- Truman and Eisenhower believed Puerto Rico could be independent



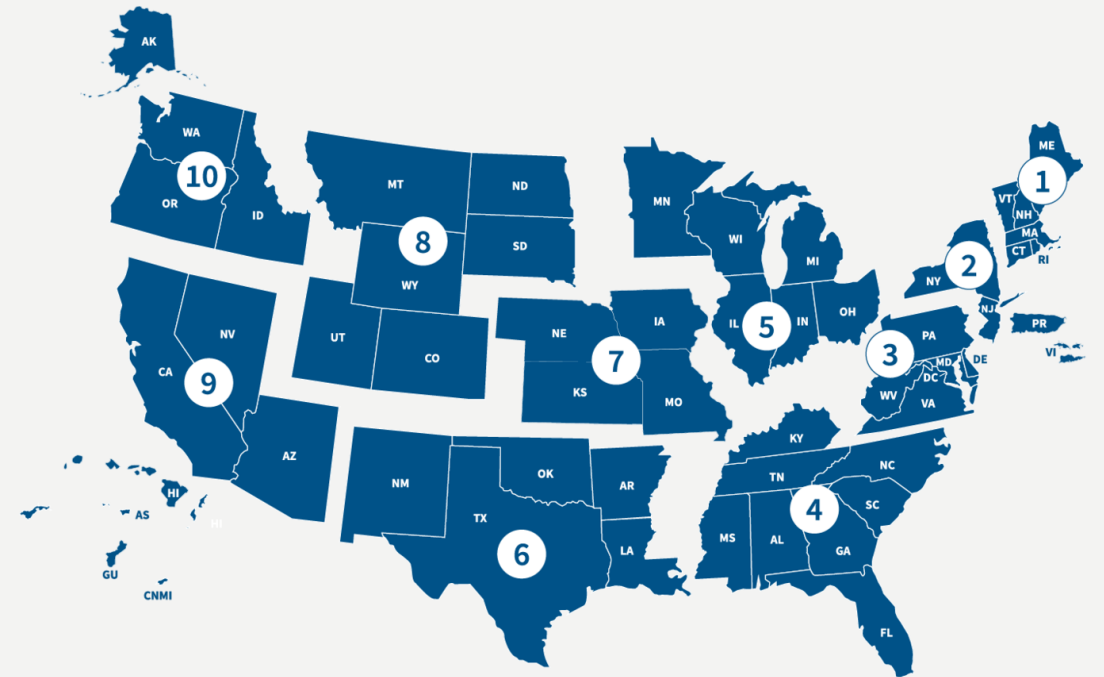
HURRICANE SANTA CLARA 1956

- **Federal Disaster Relief Act 1950**
- **16 deaths**
- **\$40 million in property damage**
- **Muñoz Marín wants Puerto Rico to handle disaster relief without U.S. aid**
- **Eisenhower overrules him and declares disaster**



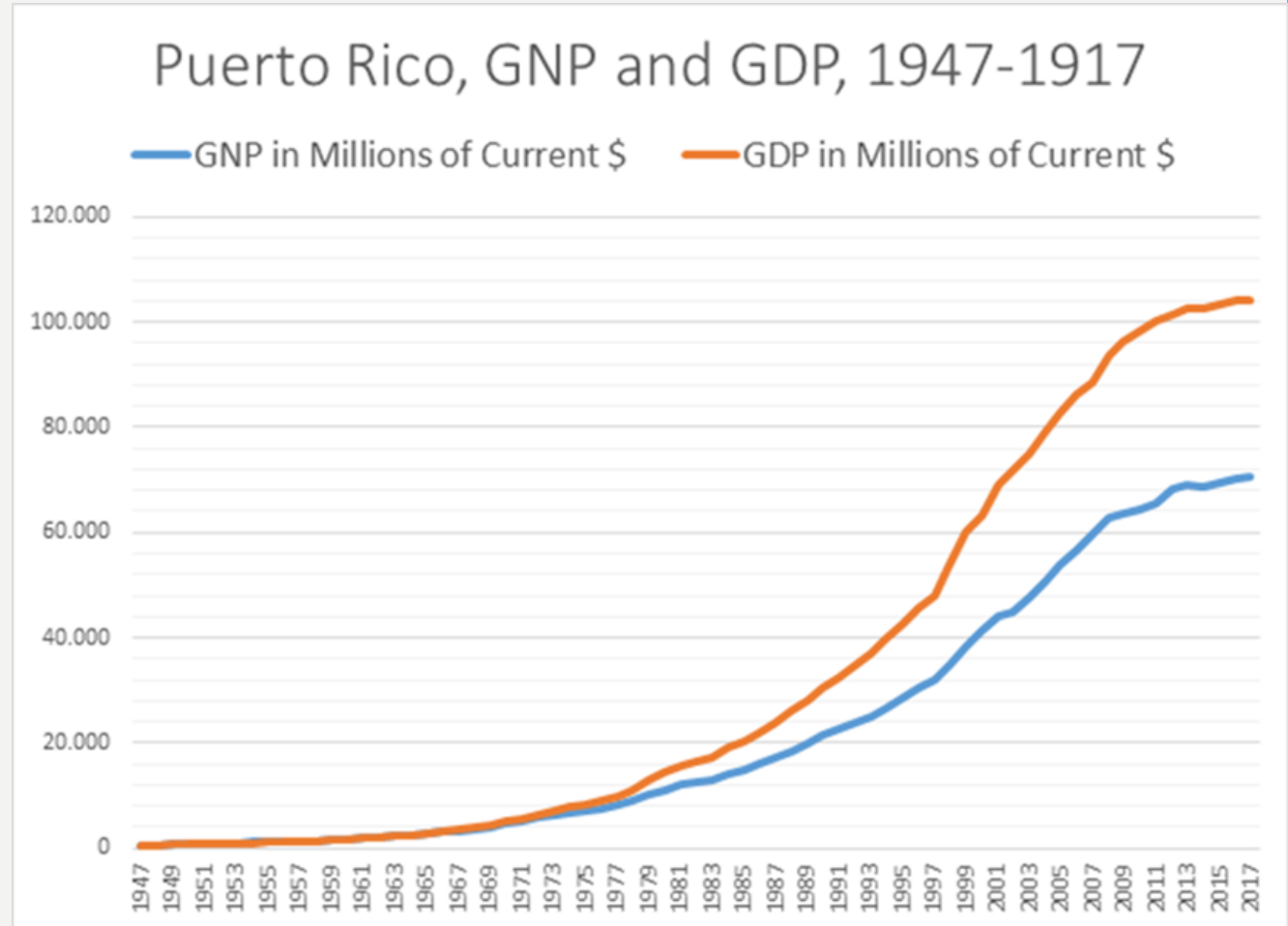
FEMA AND NEW APPROACHES TO DISASTER RELIEF

- FEMA passed in 1979
- Process for acquiring aid more complicated
- Increasing effects of climate change stretching FEMA thin
- Between 1980 and 2020 the costs associated with climate-related disasters in the U.S. and its territories exceeded \$1.79 trillion



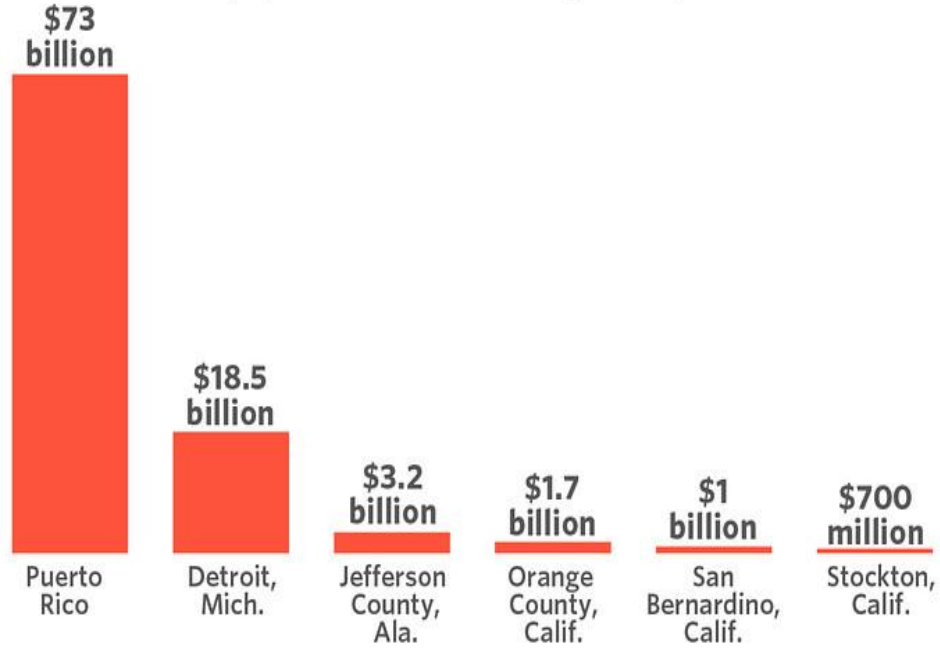
HALLMARKS OF U.S. DISASTER RELIEF

- **Legacies of Operation Bootstrap**
- **Section 936 tax haven**
- **Debt Crisis**
- **PROMESA**



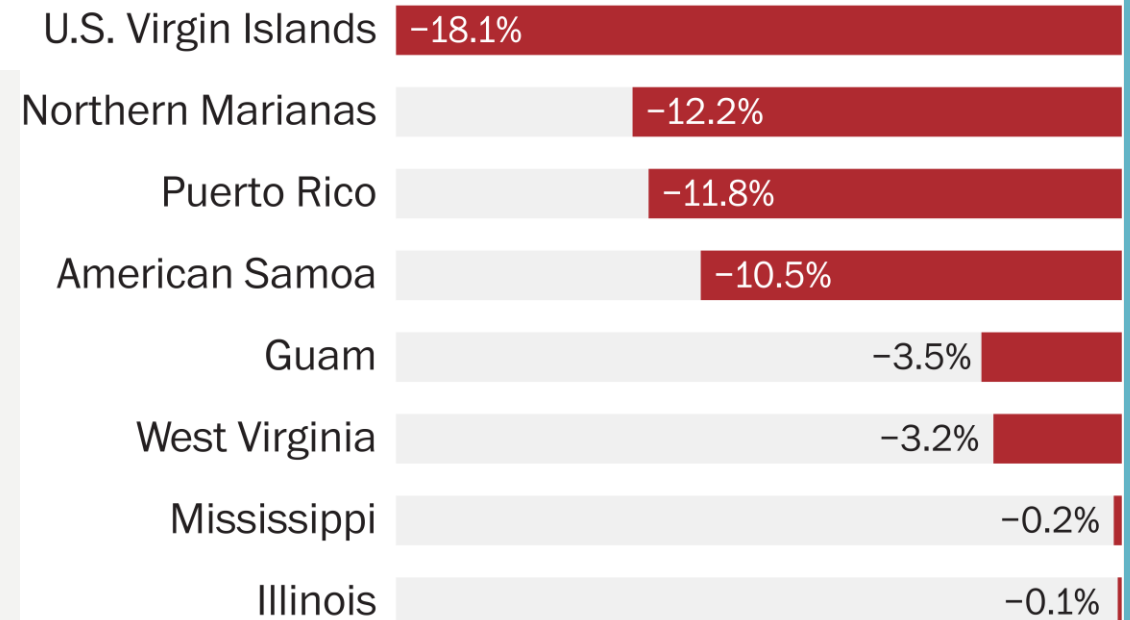
Puerto Rico debt woes

The island's bankruptcy would be four times larger than previous record



Source: Chapman & Cutler

Losing population from 2010 to 2020



FACTS, FIGURES, AND UNDERLYING CONDITIONS

- **Between 2000-2020, 11.8 percent of the population migrated off the island**
- **When Hurricane Maria hit in 2017, Puerto Rico had over \$74 million in bonded debt**
- **Unemployment was twice the national average at 10.8 percent**
- **Puerto Rico imported over 90 percent of its food products from the United States**
- **Infrastructure neglected and power grid antiquated**

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? DECOLONIZING DISASTER

- **Policies for Climate refugees**
- **Debt forgiveness**
- **Establish local networks of relief assistance to bypass FEMA**

