

On July 4, 1952, Puerto Rico entered the Commonwealth of the United States as an unincorporated territory directly under the supervision of the U.S. Congress. On that day, President Truman signed legislation giving the people the power to have their own constitution, with greater control of their own affairs. Thus, Puerto Rico is the first overseas Commonwealth territory (defined as "a free and associated state" or "*estado libre asociado*") of the United States. From 1900 through 1952, progressive changes were made in the relationship of the island to the mainland. As a result, Puerto Ricans have enjoyed a steadily rising standard of living, and U.S. citizenship without the disadvantage of liability for U.S. federal income taxes.

System of Government

Puerto Rico's unique status within the U.S. has no direct parallel in the American system. In many respects, it resembles that of a state of the Union, although it operates under a constitution adopted by the people. Under this constitution, the Legislature and the Senate of the island control lawmaking in all matters that are normally under the authority of the individual states. Thus, the Commonwealth completely controls its schools, police, courts, public works, internal communications such as telephone and telegraph, etc. Puerto Ricans are citizens of the United States and have all rights, privileges and obligations of any other citizen, with the exception that islanders may not vote in U.S. presidential elections unless they move to the mainland.

The constitution is in complete harmony with that of the U.S., providing for the checks and balances of legislative, executive and judicial branches of the government. However, in some respects it is even broader, guaranteeing, for example, representation of minority parties in the House and Senate.

As was the case with former U.S. territories such as Alaska and Hawaii, Puerto Ricans have no vote in presidential elections. However, Puerto Rico does have a voice in the U.S. Congress through a resident Commissioner, who is elected by the people to a four-year term. The Commissioner has all the privileges of a member of the Congress except the right to vote.

In preservation of the ancient U.S. principle of "no taxation without representation," Puerto Rico is not subject to U.S. federal taxes. It enjoys fiscal autonomy within the U.S. customs union, which allows trade under the same provisions as

Many churches offer services in both Spanish and English