

SECTION  
**3**

**BEFORE YOU READ**

# Puerto Rico

## CULTURAL IDENTITY OF A PEOPLE

**Key Terms**  
 citizen  
 commonwealth  
 constitution

**Key Places**  
 San Juan  
 Condado

**Questions to Explore**

1. What factors influenced Puerto Rican culture?
2. What is Puerto Rico's relationship with the United States?

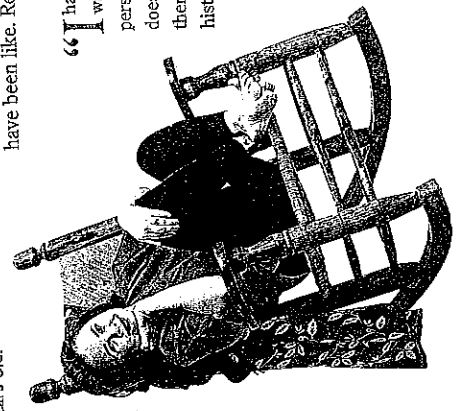
**Reach Into Your Background**

Do you ever feel that you have "two selves"? One that acts a

**P**uerto Rican Esmeralda Santiago (ez mur EL duh sant ee AHG oh) can never forget the first time she saw the movie *West Side Story*. She was living in New York. It was 1961, and she was 13 years old. The movie was about Puerto Ricans living in New York, but most of the actors who played them were English-speaking whites. To her, they just didn't seem like Puerto Rican people.

Seeing the movie was a turning point in Esmeralda's life. She knew the movie was not about her. But she did not know what the film should have been like. Realizing this made her feel confused.

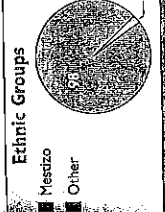
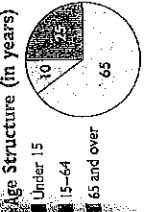
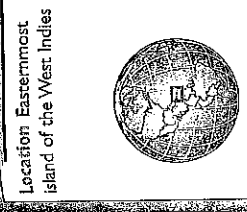
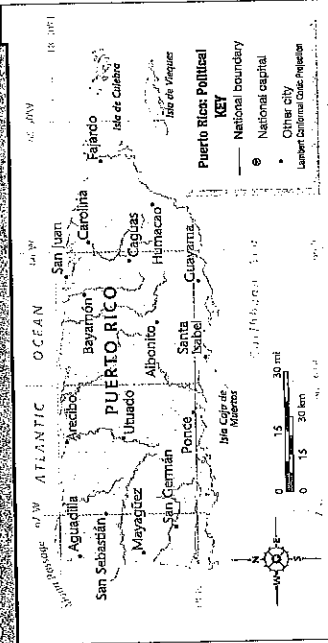
**"I** had no sense of Puerto Rican culture or what it was to me. Where did I come from? Who is this person who calls herself a Puerto Rican and what does that mean? . . . [W]hen I think Puerto Rican, there's this big void, this empty space where my history should be."



### Puerto Rican and American

Even though Esmeralda felt confused about who she was, she remembered her early days in Puerto Rico vividly. When Esmeralda's mother brought her to New York City, everything changed.

### Commonwealth of Puerto Rico



**Climate** Tropical  
**Terrain** Mountains surrounded by a broken coastal plain  
**Population** 3.9 million  
**Major Religions** Christianity

**Government** Commonwealth of the United States  
**Economy** Agriculture: coffee, vegetables, sugar cane, bananas, pineapples, tobacco, and rice  
**Major industries:** manufacturing of medicines, chemicals, machinery and metals, tourism

**Exports** Medicines, food products, electrical machinery  
**Imports** Food, chemicals, petroleum

**Map and Chart Study** This map shows Puerto Rico. Location Read the description of Puerto Rico's terrain. Where are Puerto Rico's mountains located? How do you know? Movement How do you think most exports

are shipped out of Puerto Rico? **Critical Thinking** Look at the chart that shows age structure. Would you say that Puerto Rico's population is old, young, or evenly balanced? Why?

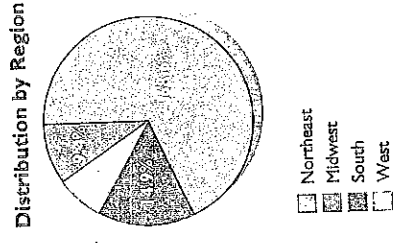
It was not that Esmeralda was completely separated from her people. Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens. Citizens are individuals with certain rights and responsibilities under a particular government. However, Puerto Ricans cannot vote in U.S. presidential elections. They do not pay U.S. taxes. And they have only a non-voting representative in the U.S. Congress. Puerto Rico is a commonwealth of the United States. A commonwealth is a place that has its own government but also has strong ties to another country. Esmeralda had the right to return to Puerto Rico whenever she chose.

Esmeralda found life on the mainland strange and confusing. One problem was that to succeed in school, she had to improve her English. Esmeralda was also confused by her new group of friends. She found that Puerto Ricans living on the mainland were different from her friends on the island of Puerto Rico. Instead of the salsa and merengue

**Puerto Ricans in the Mainland, United States**

**Chart Study** Many Puerto Ricans have moved to the mainland United States. Critical Thinking Which region of the mainland has the most Puerto Ricans? What do you think draws Puerto Ricans to a particular area?

Region	Population
North	2,728,000
Midwest	1,872,000
South	258,000
West	406,000
Total	192,000



**READ ACTIVELY**

Connect What kind of music do you listen to? Does the music you listen to reflect your feelings about your life and your community? Why or why not?

music she loved, they preferred rock music. Most of the time they spoke neither pure Spanish nor English, but a mixture of the two that they called "Spanglish." Although they were Puerto Rican, Esmeralda felt different from them. Eventually she learned their ways. She became more like them and thought less about her old life on the island.

Most Puerto Ricans who move to the mainland keep connections to Puerto Rico. As people travel back and forth between the mainland and Puerto Rico, they bring customs and products with them. If you visited Puerto Rico, you would see many influences from the U.S. mainland. You would also see that in Puerto Rico, there is a strong cultural connection to the Caribbean. Most people are a mix of Spanish and African ancestry. Some Puerto Ricans like to look even further back into their history by calling themselves "Boricuas" (bohr ee KOO uh). The name comes from the Boriqueno (boir ee KAY noh), an indigenous farming people who lived on the island before the Spanish arrived.

The land of Puerto Rico is a memory no Puerto Rican forgets. Some, like Esmeralda Santiago, never go back to it. But others return, longing for the familiar ways they left behind. Julia de Jesus Chaparro (HOO ee a day HAY soos sha PAHR ro) moved back to a small mountain village in Puerto Rico after more than 14 years in Boston. She is fond of saying that where she lives now there are "more than the four walls of the city." To prove what she means, she takes visitors to her back porch. Outside it, one can see a row of steep mountains. Peeking between them is the bright blue of the Caribbean Sea. The mountain slopes steeply

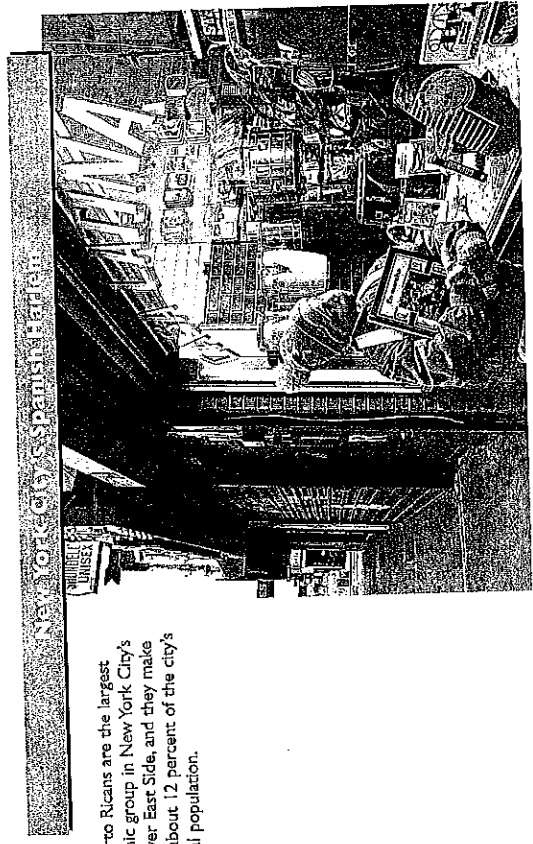
**READ ACTIVELY**

Visualize What might you see if you looked out the back door of an apartment in the city? What might you see if you looked out the back door of a house in the countryside?

down from her back porch, but she has managed to clear some land. Her garden of mangoes, coconuts, grapefruit, and lemons thrives in the sun. Behind a nearby tree, a hen and six chickens are pecking in the dirt. On other parts of the island, farmers ride horses through fields of tall sugar cane. Higher in the hills, Puerto Rican cowhands, called *finqueros* (fih ee bah roh), hunt, fish, and raise chickens, pigs, and cattle. To the southwest, where the land gets lower, fishing villages dot the coast. Puerto Rico is an island of cities as well as countryside. Puerto Rican cities show influences of Spanish, Caribbean, and U.S. mainland cultures. About 70 percent of Puerto Ricans live in cities. Many city people work in factories. Others work in the hotels and restaurants that draw many tourists. Puerto Rico's capital, San Juan (san HWAAN), has a large waterfront area known as the Condado (koh nah DAH do). It is packed with luxury hotels. Not far away, modern skyscrapers pierce the brilliant sky. In the old section of San Juan, Spanish-style buildings are everywhere. A 450-year-old Catholic church built by the Spanish has been carefully restored. Not far from it sit ancient houses graced with iron balconies in lacy Spanish style.

**A Commonwealth in Question**

In 1951, Puerto Ricans voted to adopt their own constitution. A constitution is a statement of a country's basic laws and values. This gave Puerto Rico its own group of lawmakers. But it was still connected



Puerto Ricans are the largest ethnic group in New York City's Lower East Side, and they make up about 12 percent of the city's total population.

to the United States. Puerto Rico is bound by many United States laws. Puerto Ricans have many questions about this. Is it good for Puerto Rico? Should Puerto Rico become independent? Or should it become a state of the United States?

**READ ACTIVELY**

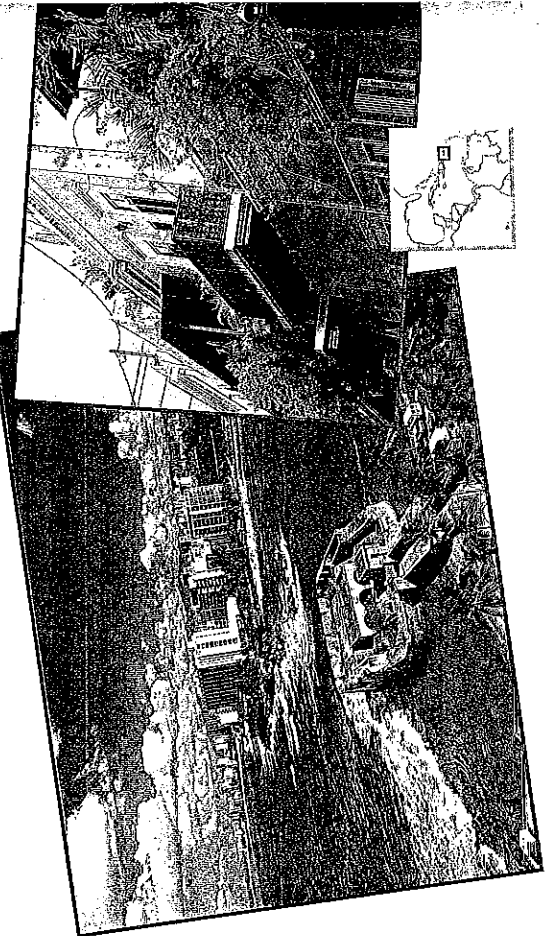
Connect Would people in your area want to become part of another state? Why or why not?

**What Direction to Take!** Puerto Ricans have many disagreements over the answers to these questions. Many feel that having "one foot" in Puerto Rico and "one foot" in the United States can lead to problems. Others point out how the relationship with the United States has helped Puerto Rico. U.S. businesses on the island have raised the standard of living. Each year, the U.S. government sends millions of dollars to the island to help people in need.

Some people still feel that Puerto Rico has a disadvantage because people there cannot vote in U.S. elections. They say Puerto Rico should try to become a state. But if it does, it will become the poorest state in the union. Puerto Ricans earn more money than people in other Caribbean countries. However, they earn less than people on the U.S. mainland. Also, if Puerto Rico becomes a state, Puerto Ricans will have

**San Juan, Oldest City in New**

San Juan, Puerto Rico's oldest city, is famous for historic forts and the wrought-iron balconies of its oldest neighborhoods. But San Juan is also a vacation spot for tourists, with modern hotels lining its sandy beaches.



▶ These women are celebrating Puerto Rico's Spanish heritage. Puerto Ricans celebrate many holidays with traditional music and dancing.

to pay U.S. taxes. This could lower the earnings of many who have little to spare. For these reasons, in 1993 and again in 1998, Puerto Ricans voted not to become the 51st state of the United States.

**The Question of Independence** Some people who voted against statehood have even bigger dreams for the country. They want Puerto Rico to become a separate nation. If not, they fear that Puerto Ricans will become confused about their identity, just as Esmeralda Santiago became confused about hers. They stress Puerto Rico's connection to other Caribbean nations. They want to make sure that Puerto Ricans always identify with the Spanish language and Spanish culture. But for now, Puerto Rico will keep its links to the mainland. Many Puerto Ricans hope that their relationship with the United States will lead to a profitable and peaceful future.

**SECTION 3 REVIEW**

1. Define (a) citizen, (b) commonwealth, (c) constitution.
2. Identify (a) San Juan, (b) Condado.
3. What is the political connection between Puerto Rico and the United States?

**Activity**  
**6. Writing to Learn** Try to put yourself in Esmeralda Santiago's place. Write a paragraph telling what it was like to move to New York from Puerto Rico.

**Critical Thinking**  
**5. Identifying Central Issues** What are the three options Puerto Ricans consider in terms of their relationship with the United States? What are the benefits and drawbacks of each?

**4.** Compare life in the mainland United States with life in Puerto Rico.