Interesting Islands of the Sea—Porto Rico

J. B. Hagberg

To cite this article: J. B. Hagberg (1911) Interesting Islands of the Sea—Porto Rico, *Journal of Geography*, 10:3, 96-97, DOI: [10.1080/00221341108985654](https://doi.org/10.1080/00221341108985654)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00221341108985654>

Published online: 20 May 2008.

Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)

Article views: 3

View related articles [↗](#)

INTERESTING ISLANDS OF THE SEA—PORTO RICO

By J. B. HAGBERG,
Formerly of the Porto Rico Normal School

PORTO RICO is one of the most valuable tropical possessions of the United States. It is some 1400 miles from New York and reached by steamer from New York to San Juan in about 5 days. From San Juan, P. R. to Havana, Cuba, is a distance of about 1000 miles.

The island is roughly rectangular, 100 miles in extent from East to West, while 36 miles is about the average distance from North to South. Of the 3600 square miles, very little is level. The northern and eastern slopes are well watered the year round, as the prevailing northeast trades leave their moisture there, but long periods of drought are frequently experienced on the south side. This fact has made necessary the irrigation project now well under way. It is proposed to tunnel through the mountains at several favorable places and divert some of the water of north-flowing streams to the fields on the south. As a matter of fact, much has already been done.

Much of the dry land on the south side is given over to grazing, so more cattle and horses are raised on the southern side than on the north.

Although the island is extremely hilly, transportation and travel are made possible by a network of very good roads. The principal road is the "carretera" from San Juan, on the north coast, to Ponce on the south, about 80 miles in length. A trip over this road by carriage or automobile is one of the delights of the traveler, as more picturesque scenery would be hard to imagine. An altitude of about 2500 feet is reached at one point along the way.

The last Federal census gave Porto Rico a population of over 1,000,000 inhabitants; in round numbers, 300 inhabitants per square mile. For a strictly agricultural country the population is dense. The principal centers of population are naturally found along the coast. San Juan, the capital, has a population of over 50,000. Ponce has about the same number.

The racial mixture in Porto Rico is of every degree, from a mere trace of black to a type where the African characteristics predominate. Besides the negro element, and the European, there is also found a survival of the Carib Indian, the aborigine of the island. The percentage of all white is undoubtedly small, limited to families whose immediate ancestry came from Europe at a comparatively recent date. Judged by the number of males of voting age who declare themselves illiterate at the polls, and have their ballots marked for them, the percentage of illiteracy in Porto Rico is high.

Under the present American regime there is carried out a policy of

universal primary instruction. Every town and "barrio" of any size is provided with a school of some sort for primary instruction. All the larger towns have good school buildings, and in many of them the instruction is carried on almost entirely in English. The larger cities have high schools, and there is a normal school at Rio Piedras. An elementary school of agriculture is to be established. The insular government also grants a number of scholarships to students who wish to pursue work in the States.

Porto Rico is entirely an agricultural country, with sugar as its staple article of export. The growth of the sugar industry has been phenomenal since American occupation. The value of raw sugar exported during the past year was over \$25,000,000. Tobacco and coffee are also exported, the former to the United States, and the latter almost wholly to Europe. Many American planters are engaged in raising pineapples, grape fruit and oranges for the American market. All fruit is shipped to New York. There has been a very marked advance in the cost of living to everyone since American occupation. Wages, however, have advanced, and no doubt the general standard of living has been raised.

The social side of life in Porto Rico centers around the "casinos" or social clubs, usually to be found in every town of any size. The favorite form of social diversion is the dance, frequently held on Sunday evenings, as Sunday is primarily a day for diversion. Every town boasts of its "plaza," where it is customary to go on Sunday evening to hear the band concert.

The peculiar form of government and the political status of the Porto Rican has caused no end of debate and consequent division into parties and factions. At present the Porto Rican is not an American citizen, nor is he a citizen of any other country. Neither is he entirely self-governing, as the upper house of the legislature (combining both executive and legislative functions) is appointive. Newspapers, both pro and anti-American in sympathies exist, and politics are usually at fever heat. On the whole, however, the affairs of government run smoothly, and Porto Rico is enjoying a measure of material prosperity never before experienced.

NOTES ON SOUTH AMERICA

(Largely extracted from the *Bulletin of the Pan-American Union*)

THE years 1910 and 1911 mark the centennial years of independence throughout Latin America.

Among the Republics whose celebrations took an active form were Chile, where a month was devoted to national and international festivities; Mexico, with somewhat similar displays of national enthusiasm, and Co-