



The Sentry Box

Freda Kirchwey of THE NATION took a look down the full length of her nose at the awful Americans during a recent visit to Puerto Rico. We are ruining everything and Puerto Ricans are greatly alarmed. Let a bunch of Americans get loose anywhere and they will always behave that way.

Sailors are insisting upon singing "Home on the Range" when they get a little tight, tourists insist upon finding some one who speaks "bad" English and what we are doing to La Fortaleza is nobody's business.

"I am told on the highest authority", declares THE NATION's Madam Sneeze", (it is) to be restored exactly; tiles frescos, every detail. But Puerto Rico doesn't believe it. People think it will be 'Americanized'; what horrors of plastic and chromium they expect I can only imagine. It is characteristic of the underlying disharmony of the place that they have no trust in the first-rate architects and engineers sent by 'Washington'. The Fortaleza belongs to Puerto Rico and the Americans are tearing it to pieces."

It seems as though the NATION has an idea that Governor Leahy should be content to haul the wash tub out onto the kitchen floor of a Saturday night. If he follows any other procedure he is just another of those "damned Yankees" who are so distressing to simon pure Americans travelling about and giving "Tourist's-eye Views" of Puerto Rico. It is so distressing for an accredited intellectual from New York to be thrown into contact with vulgar Americans. Of course we do have Mrs. Muñoz Marin to solace the visitor with authoritative comment upon what Puerto Rican believe and what they do not believe. She can be relied upon, too, to reveal just exactly where the crude Washington architects are going to install chromium plating and point out why running water, telephones and reenforced concrete are "typically American" and therefore undesirable in such buildings as La Fortaleza.

Now we will have to back up to that last paragraph and find a way of eliminating the reference to Madam Sneeze as an "American". She doesn't like the term as applied to people who are native to the United States. The intelligentsia, when down in this part of the world, generally contrive to get upset over the designation of a part of the population of the western hemisphere as "Americans" and there is no one who can hold forth longer and more spiritedly upon that feature of "yankee imperialism", than Mrs. Luis Muñoz Marin. The world at large accepts the designation of citizens of the United States as being convenient. The designation is accepted as having a definitive meaning. The radicals, looking around for ways of sympathizing with the Yankee haters in this part of the world, complain because Americans are known as Americans, They insist that it is a bit of subtle propoganda put out by the Americans rather than world-wide acceptance of a term to designate the populace of a nation so named that the words cannot be adjusted to describe the people. The undertakers, feeling much the same way, renamed themselves morticians.

Anyone who has ever sat in at one of the all night sessions in which the flat heeled girls and long haired boys labor and groan over the woes of the world knows the story. We find that the United States is a country inhabited by 124,999,985 Americans and 15,000 readers of THE NATION.

The 15,000 have a tough time figuring out why people occupying the Island of Puerto Rico refer to the family on one side of the street as "Puerto Ricans" and another family as "Americans". To set it down as tendency on the part of human beings to employ words and descriptive terms in speech would over simplify a very normal symptom of human conduct. It impresses no one as at all strange if a Puerto Rican designates a neighbor as a Venezuelan or a Britisher. There is nothing odd or unusual if we differentiate between two individuals by describing one as colored and the other as white. But, if you want to indicate that an individual you pass on the street originated in the United States, you should avoid employing the one word that the entire world accepts as describing exactly what you want to say.

Being a radical is a pretty tough assignment. Most of us have our own personal worries. We have to earn a living, see that the family is fed (avoid getting into trouble with the neighbors and be alert for any health menaces confronting us. If you are a radical you have to add the woes of the entire world to your own worries. And even these are not abundant enough.

To the actual woes of worlds and communities, the roving radicals have to get all boiled up over the probability that there will be electric lights in La Fortaleza when it is restored and that Americans, with malace aforthought, keep on being Americans and continue to force a reluctant world to call them Americans. No crime is of greater magnitude than (or even including) insistence upon Hitler's part that all Germans raise their arms and say "heil Hitler" when they meet and part.

If you get around behind this great international problem, you will find that local disidents who object to having people designated as Americans, are just a little uncertain of their own right to such a designation. Mrs. Muñoz Marin, for example, is an American by birth and she will have to go on being an American all her life, no matter how distressing. There is nothing she can do about it. The NATION will be unable to relieve her, and even should her husband contrive to become President of the Republic of Puerto Rico, she would still remain an American. That is the way things stand, and until the 15,000 NATION readers find a word that will do as much for Americans as the word "beautician" has done for the nail polishers and face lifters, we will have to put up with it.

We will have to put up with the NATION, too. Dogs put up with fleas. The dog doesn't worry much about his fleas. He turns them over from time to time, but it is the lady of the house who gets out the flea powder. NATION people will always be coming down here to worry about the Americanization of Puerto Rico. They will always be going out to the University to discover the might and majesty of Muñoz Marin's popular front party and to record the fact that if it weren't for Uncle Sam Puerto Rico would today be a modernized version of the Garden of Eden. We frequently hear the suggestion advanced for the benefit of the Stalinists that if they do not like the United States they can go and live in Russia. And all of us have the privilege of not reading the NATION if we do not like it, which most of us don't do.