

## A Puerto Rican Tsunami

Puerto Ricans cannot vote for president, so they are denied the attention and respect that they deserve as a people. There is a precedent and a way to gain the presidential vote without committing to statehood. Let us unite to make this dream a reality!

Puerto Rico 2017: in addition to confronting the consequences of the whirlwind of inherited debt, it has suffered the effect of two disastrous hurricanes in less than two weeks, which left the island with the infrastructure in shambles. Because of the affiliation with the United States we can predict that, one way or another, it will be re-established. That does not mean that the reaction of the giant country has been reasonable or just. It reacted, but only with the pressure from many voices and with the attention of the media has it begun to dedicate itself seriously.

After more than a century as part of the United States, the President of the US describes the challenge of helping Puerto Rico, "The response and recovery effort probably has never been seen for something like this. This is an island surrounded by water. Big water. Ocean water." We are a very little understood entity; the majority of our fellow citizens do not know that we are a part of the US; they think that we are some sort of Mexicans stuck over there somewhere. Unhappily we are like the Cervantine animal, "the toad who dreamed of being an ox," thinking that we are important to the nation, but there is nothing further from the truth.

But, thanks to the tragedies that our "free associated state"/commonwealth has suffered in 2017, our fellow citizens are more aware of the reality in today's Puerto Rico. If we ever hope to be sufficiently important to put our two cents' worth in determining the future of this great nation, this is the moment to begin a wave of pressure, a tsunami of inclusion, but not in the traditional way; let's forget about the interminable fights among statehood, independence, the status quo whether improved or not, or "none of the above". Let's go straight to the point: to exercise an influence, we need power, and that power is initially concentrated in the presidential vote. We do not have to be a state to win that right; without it no one will pay attention to us, but with it we will finally begin to gain importance.

There is a precedent. During the decade of the 60s, the reality of the inequality among the District of Columbia and the states caught the attention of the US congress: there was a quantity of American citizens that was greater than the population of some states who could not vote for president, and they rectified the situation with the 23<sup>rd</sup> Amendment to the Constitution. Let's take a look at some interesting data comparing Puerto Rico with the District of Columbia:

	Population (2016)	Geographic Area (miles <sup>2</sup> )	Representation in Congreso	Representation in the Electoral College
District of Columbia	681,170	68	1 Non-voting Delegate	3
Puerto Rico	3,411,000	3,515	1 Non-voting Delegate	0

Why can't Puerto Ricans vote for the president? It is not because we are not a state. It is because we are not included in the Electoral College, and, until the decade of the 60s, only the states were

represented in that college. But in 1961 the 23<sup>rd</sup> Amendment was ratified; its purpose was to extend membership in the Electoral College to an entity that was not a state but was a part of the US. Each state has the right to one member for each senator and each representative in the congress: the District of Columbia has a right to the number of members as if it were a state, or not less than the same number of candidates as the least populous state (the number of representatives is based on the state population). After the process of voting for president every four years, the Electoral College convenes and elects the president. In the majority of the cases, all of the members of the College are obliged to vote as the majority of their states vote. This process results in the inequality of value of each vote, because each vote in Wyoming, for example, counts for more than each vote in California, and it is because of that system that a candidate can win the presidency without winning the popular vote.

Without fighting over statehood or the other alternatives, the best way to win would be to eliminate the Electoral College and implement the direct vote, because it is because of our absence in that college that costs us our participation in the democratic process. But, although there are many frustrated with that system, the only way it could be changed is by way of a constitutional amendment as that system is included in the Constitution itself as well as the 12<sup>th</sup> Amendment, and that process is long and difficult. But there is a solution. The purpose of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Amendment is to resolve the same problem with the District of Columbia—to give it the presidential vote without being a state, which it does. The second article gives congress the right to manage it. If we could gain the inclusion of Puerto Rico in the dictates of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Amendment, we could begin to impact the future of the country.

Friend, this is a seed that is being planted. To make it grow and convert into a wave, or even a Puerto Rican tsunami, it must be planted thousands of times in fertile soil. We must take the idea seriously without allowing partisan contamination; we must share it with all boricuas on and away from the island. We must share ideas, strategies, illusions and realities. This begins today. It is a deal among us, and it has not been shared with any official or any political party. Let's see how serious we are about wanting to control the future of our blessed island. It won't be easy in view of the existing forces (or lack thereof). Let's count on ourselves, with hearts of gold. Let's dress ourselves with intelligence and determination, because united, we can do it!