

This Day in History... January 2, 1949

Puerto Rico's First Democratically Elected Governor

On January 2, 1949, Luis Muñoz Marín became Puerto Rico's first independently-elected governor.

Puerto Rico had been governed by Spain for more than three centuries before it was annexed by the United States in 1898. For the next fifty years, its governor was appointed by America's president. In 1946, President Harry S. Truman appointed the island's first full-time Puerto Rican governor – Jesús T. Piñero.

However, twice previously a Puerto Rican had temporarily served as governor. The first time was in 1579, when Juan Ponce de León II, the grandson of explorer Ponce de León, served as interim governor until the arrival of Spanish Governor Jerónimo De Aguero Campuzano. Also, in 1923, Juan Bernardo Huyke temporarily held the position in between the administrations of Americans Emmet Montgomery Reily and Horace Mann Towner.



Marín is regarded as the "Father of Modern Puerto Rico" and the "Architect of the Commonwealth."

Then, in 1947, the United States Congress passed the Elective Governors Act, allowing Puerto Rico to elect its own governor. On November 2, 1948, the first elections for governor of Puerto Rico were held. Luis Muñoz Marín, a member of the Popular Democratic Party, emerged victorious, with 61.2% of the vote.

Marín first became involved in politics in the 1930s. As a member of the Puerto Rican Senate, he supported industrialization and agricultural reform. As president of the senate, Marín helped form Operation Bootstrap, which encouraged investment in manufacturing plants and job training for those in poverty. Additionally, he was instrumental in passing "Law 53 of 1948," also known as the "Gag Law." This law made it illegal to own or display the Flag of Puerto Rico or otherwise advocate or be seen as advocating for Puerto Rico's independence. During his campaign for governor, Marín claimed, "Don't trust politicians, even me. If you want to sell your vote, go ahead: it's a free country. But make up your minds that you can't have justice and the \$2.00."

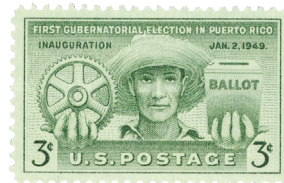
On January 2, 1949, Marín was sworn in as Puerto Rico's first independently elected governor, a position he held until 1965. Under his leadership, Puerto Rico was given greater autonomy from the US and adopted a constitution. After serving five terms, supporters wanted Muñoz Marín to run again. He declined, saying "I am not your strength... You are your own strength." The former governor was praised by world leaders for the advances his country made under his leadership. *Time* magazine called Marín "one of the most influential politicians in recent times, whose works will be remembered for years to come."



Three red stripes represent the blood of warriors. Two white stripes stand for victory and peace. A white star on a blue triangle symbolizes the island of Puerto Rico surrounded by the blue sky and water. The triangle stands for the three branches of government.

Puerto Rico became a Commonwealth of the United States in 1952, and Congress approved the first Constitution of Puerto Rico. It listed rules on how Puerto Rico's governors could be elected, including one that states if the margin of victory is less than half a percent, then a full recount must occur. This happened in 1980 and 2004.

Sila Calderón became the first woman to be elected governor of Puerto Rico when she won the 2000 election. She served from 2001-2005. Calderón previously served as mayor of San Juan from 1997-2001.



Stamp pictures a rural farmer with a wheel representing industry and a ballot box.



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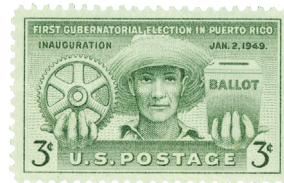
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