

# Puerto Ricans continue their search for identity in the United States

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Pro-statehood supporters at the seaside Capitol in San Juan, Puerto Rico, January 2, 2017. AP Photo

Puerto Rico is an island in the Caribbean. It is about 1,150 miles from Florida.

Since 1898, it has been part of the United States. However, it is not officially a state.

Puerto Rican people are considered U.S. citizens. They have many rights that are protected by the Constitution.

The Constitution is the official law of the United States. It says what the government can or cannot do to its people.

It was not always like this. There are still many questions about how Puerto Ricans fit into the United States.

## Status Of Those Born In Puerto Rico

U.S. law says Puerto Rico is a territory. It is ruled by the United States government, but it is not a true state.

For many years, Puerto Rico was owned by Spain. Spain ruled Cuba, Puerto Rico and other islands from far away. These islands wanted to govern themselves. They wanted to be free from Spain. In the 1800s, some of these islands started fighting against Spain. They wanted to be free. They sometimes asked the United States to help them fight against Spain.



In 1898, the United States declared war against Spain. This was called the Spanish-American War. The U.S. won. It claimed Puerto Rico and other islands owned by Spain.

The United States wanted to govern Puerto Rico. U.S. lawmakers pointed to the Constitution. They said it allowed the United States this power.

The United States rules over many islands. Puerto Rico, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands belong to the U.S.

In 1901, the Supreme Court made a ruling. They said that these islands would be called "territories." They would not become official states.

### **Are Puerto Ricans Constitutional Citizens?**

People in territories like Puerto Rico are not usually fully protected by the Constitution. U.S. citizens are fully protected.

The Nationality Act was passed in 1940. It said that Puerto Ricans are official U.S. citizens. Being born in Puerto Rico was now the same as being born in the United States.

However, lawmakers and experts say that Puerto Ricans can't get full citizenship.

Puerto Ricans are officially U.S. citizens. However, they can't vote in U.S. elections.

This has allowed the United States to rule Puerto Rico unfairly. It belongs to the U.S., but is not a part of the country.

On June 11, Puerto Ricans will have a vote. They will decide if Puerto Rico should become a U.S. state or its own country. But, it is an unofficial vote. Only the United States government can decide if Puerto Rico becomes a state.