



THE VIRGIN ISLANDS OF THE UNITED STATES
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October 2nd, 2023

Good morning, Honorable Senator Angel Bolques Jr. , Chair of the Committee on Homeland Security, Justice and Public Safety, members of the Committee, Honorable Jose A. Corcino Acevedo, Alcade Del Municipio de Vieques and his guests, my VIPR committee colleagues and the viewing and listening audience. I am Sammuel Sanes, Administrator for the island of St. Croix.

It's a privilege and honor to speak in this institution, where I served for five terms. It's even more incredible honor to speak about Virgin Islands /– Puerto Rico Friendship Day, a public holiday celebrated in the U.S. Virgin Islands on the second Monday in October.

As all of you are aware, VIPR Friendship Day was established in 1964 by Governor Paiewonsky, it honors Puerto Ricans who reside in or who have made substantial contributions to the Virgin Islands. However, our relationship with Puerto Rico goes way back, at least over 200 years. .

Puerto Rico was a major haven for Maritime Maroons from the Danish West Indies, although slaves fled to other places in the Caribbean. The northwest of St. Croix, you can see El Yunque mountain in Puerto Rico and the hills of Vieques on the horizon of the Caribbean Sea.

In 1779, Fernando Miyares Gonzales, a Cuban-born military officer in Puerto Rico, observed Maritime Maroons from the Leeward Islands, including Danish slaves seeking their freedom near San Juan. Then, a Spanish clergyman and historian named Frav Agustin Abbad V Lasierra

also mentioned that he observed Maritime Maroons or refugees in San Mateo de Cangrejos on the northern coast of Puerto Rico.

Some of these Maritime Maroons were escaped Danish slaves who settled near San Juan, the island's capital. Thus, places inhabited by escaped Danish slaves in Puerto Rico included San Mateo de Cangrejos, Pinones, and Loiza between 1656 and the 1800s.

In fact, in 1664, it was four Crucian Maroons who fled to Puerto Rico and stimulated the Spanish government to officially adopt a policy of offering freedom to future enslaved runaways who arrived on that island, which led to the establishment of a community of runaway slaves that eventually became known as Santurce. To this day, the area is inhabited by descendants of runaway enslaved Africans from the island St. Croix and across the entire Virgin Islands who escaped their captors and came to live in Puerto Rico.

I Want to take this time to thank Professor Ollasie from UVI for sharing his wealth of information with the public. His articles on the history between the Virgin islands and Puerto Rico are enlightening and its truly an honor to personally know this gentleman.

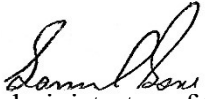
As a matter of fact, let me add on more info on the relationship between both islands. In 1952, The former Delegate to Congress, the Honorable Ron De Lugo, whose parents were Puerto Ricans, was credited with using his position as an on-air personality to help promote the return of Carnival. But the fact of the matter is, Adolf Sixto, a man born in Vieques of African Danish West Indian roots, went to Brazil to observe the carnival. His tireless work advocating for our own led to the first carnival in 1912. Imagine that!!

Lastly, I would leave you with this piece of historical fact. In the early years following the 1917 transfer of the Danish West Indies to the United States, the islands suffered from social and economic depression. In 1922, the Colonial Council decided the deplorable situation needed congressional assistance and established a committee to travel to Washington, D.C. Comprised of two councilmen, Conrad Corneiro and George Moorehead, along with Adolph Sixto, the group attempted to explain the local situation to federal officials. Because the islands were largely unknown to most of the officials, the group was unsuccessful in its efforts. However, because of their presentation in 1924 a federal commission was sent to investigate conditions in the islands.

Ladies and Gentlemen, our relationship with Puerto Rico remains strong. We, the members of the VIPR committee, are committed to ensuring that our traditions, culture, and our contributions to our beautiful Islands are not forgotten.

God bless you, and God bless the Virgin Islands of the United States.

Sincerely,


Administrator of St. Croix