

Tropic of Cancer: The United States' Human Rights Violations in Vieques

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Executive Summary:

During President Obama's presidential campaign in 2008, he wrote a letter to the then-Governor of Puerto Rico Anibal Acevedo Vilá, promising to use his resources to clean up the environment of Vieques and to monitor the health of Viequenses affected by the military's activities on the island (Colón-Ramos: 2015). After approximately 60 years of target practice, live-fire training, and weapons testing, the United States Navy stopped bombing Vieques on May 1, 2003. Vieques suffers from extensive ecological damage and health problems as a result of weapons testing, and the Navy is taking minimal responsibility. The cleanup process is moving slowly while the health of Viequenses continues to deteriorate. Since taking office, the Obama administration has not addressed a single issue concerning the island and its residents.

In September 2013, the National Lawyers Guild filed a petition with the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights accusing the United States Government of human rights violations of the island of Vieques. Ten Viequenses who have been diagnosed or have relatives who have been diagnosed with cancer filed the petition against the Navy and the Defense Department. Their demands are for the U.S. Government to address existing ecological damages and to improve health care facilities and transportation on the island (Kim: 2013). Currently, there are no chemotherapy facilities on the island, forcing cancer patients to take ferries and planes to treatment centers on mainland Puerto Rico or in the United States (Aljazeera 2013).

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs has recognized certain diseases to be associated with exposure to Agent Orange and other defoliants –chemicals that were introduced to Vieques over decades of weapons testing. Veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange have developed respiratory cancers, prostate cancer, Parkinson's disease, type II diabetes, heart disease, chronic b-cell leukemia, chloracne, lymphoma, and more (U.S. Dept. of Veteran Affairs:

2015). Some of these illnesses have presented themselves in the bodies of Vieques residents who have been exposed to various chemicals from the Navy's activities. Island residents report increased rates of cancers, asthma, diabetes, heart abnormalities, hypertension, skin conditions, and birth defects (Baver: 2006, 108). The risk of cancer in Vieques is 27% higher than on mainland Puerto Rico, and studies have shown high levels of metals in flora, fauna, and humans on the island: 34% of Vieques residents have toxic levels of mercury, 55% are contaminated with lead, and 65% are contaminated with arsenic (Gonzalez: 2013).

The National Lawyers Guild has accused the United States of violating at least several articles of the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man including: Article I, the right to life, liberty, and personal security; Article VIII, the right to residence and movement; Article IX, the right to inviolability of the home; and Article XI, the right to the preservation of health and to well-being. The actions of the United States government have endangered and stolen the lives, security, homes, health, and well-being of Viequenses.

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), an agency under the jurisdiction of the United States Department of Health and Human Services, has repeatedly concluded that they could not find "credible scientific evidence" that the Navy is responsible for any environmental or health damages on Vieques (Colón-Ramos: 2015). In 2005, the ATSDR and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) investigated the health of land crabs on Vieques: an extremely important part of the Viequenses' diet. This report revealed concentrations of PCB, organochloride pesticides, DDT, and chlordane in the soft tissue of land crabs (NOAA: 2006). The ATSDR concluded that the concentrations of these chemicals were not at high enough concentrations to cause negative health effects. However, this report reveals the disconcerting reality that these chemicals have entered the food web of Vieques.

In 2004, Vieques was deemed a Superfund site –also known as a hazardous waste site. From the 1950’s through 2001, the western area of the island was used as munitions storage and the east was used for weapons testing (Rangel: 2007). In a 2007 report from the United States Government Accountability Office, it was determined that the eastern area of the island requires 20 cleanup sites and the Western area requires 17 cleanup sites. The tedious, bureaucratic cleanup process is estimated to exceed \$235,296,000 (Rangel: 2007) and is projected to end in the year 2029, making it the most expensive and longest cleanup in military history (Stanchich: 2013).

This past April, Dr. Daniel Colón-Ramos wrote an open letter to President Obama, requesting that the President uphold his promise that was made during his presidential campaign in 2008. Colón-Ramos criticizes the surveying techniques of the ATSDR: lacking “credible scientific evidence” to support the hypothesis that there is no link between the Navy’s activities and the toxic environment of Vieques and the health of its citizens is comparable to going to Connecticut in the middle of the summer, not finding snow, and concluding that it never snows in Connecticut. ATSDR studies are believed by the scientific community to be “inconclusive by design” (Colón-Ramos: 2015). He calls on President Obama to reflect upon the findings of ATSDR and act on his promise. Until action is taken, the people of Vieques will continue to suffer the consequences of the United States’ human rights violations.

Historical Background:

The global depression of the 1930’s affected Puerto Rico’s most crucial industry –sugar cane plantations. Unemployment grew and wages fell 30% between 1930 and 1933 (Ayala: 2007, 96). In the midst of World War Two, the United States and its European allies became concerned with Nazi expansion, and the presence of German submarines in the Caribbean. If

Germany were to expand into the Caribbean, it would then have access to the Panama Canal (Barreto: 2002, 21). The Roosevelt administration decided to build a naval complex in Ceiba, Puerto Rico, named Roosevelt Roads. As the value of Vieques' land (mostly consisting of sugar cane plantations) plummeted throughout the 1930's, the United States stepped in to purchase the land in 1941. Located off the eastern coast of Puerto Rico, the island of Vieques would act as an extension of Roosevelt Roads (Barreto: 2002, 22-23).

Between 1941 and 1943, the U.S. Government purchased approximately two-thirds of the land on Vieques (Bosque-Peréz and Morera: 2006, 173). Most of Vieques was sugar plantations, and the majority of the Vieques population consisted of rural workers and *agregados*: those who worked on the sugar cane plantations but did not own any property. More than 80% of the land area was purchased from two landowners: the Benítez family and the Eastern Sugar Associates (Ayala: 2001, 26). The landowners were compensated monetarily for their land, but the rural workers and *agregados* lost their homes and jobs without any compensation. The Navy had designated a small part of the island as residence for any displaced Viequenses. Nearly 9,000 Viequenses (approximately 89% of the island's population) were relocated onto a plot of land 47% of the island's total land area (Ayala: 2001). This plot of land was named Santa María –the first slum of Vieques. Families of unemployed rural workers and *agregados* lived in 50x40 foot lots (Ayala and Bolívar: 2011).

Initially, U.S. Naval presence provided some construction jobs for Viequenses, yet by 1943, the threat of German submarines in the Caribbean faded and construction ceased (Bosque-Peréz and Morera: 2006, 197). Extreme poverty ensued on the island between 1943 and 1946. The activities of the federal government had displaced the traditional economy of the island: sugar cane plantations, pineapple production, and cattle ranching. A service economy that

catered to U.S. troops emerged on Vieques, consisting of bars, restaurants, laundry services, and prostitution (Ayala and Bolívar: 2011, 129). Island militarization found a new post-war purpose in the context of the emergent Cold War. Between 1947 and 1950, the United States government purchased more land for weapons training. This land purchase further marginalized the Viequenses, cutting off their access to the coastline and mangroves, preventing access to fish, crabs, and mangrove wood for charcoal making (Bosque-Pérez and Morera: 2006, 198).

During the Cold War period, beginning in 1947, the United States military used Vieques as a training facility for target practice and weapons testing. Vieques was the training ground for the overthrow of Guatemalan President Arbenz in 1954, the Bay of Pigs in 1961, the invasion of the Dominican Republic in 1965, the overthrow of Chilean President Allende in 1973, the invasion of Grenada in 1983, and the invasion of Panama in 1989 (Barreto: 2002, 27). The military tested napalm on the El Yunque rain forest on mainland Puerto Rico before using it in Vietnam, and in 1993, the Navy dropped 24 napalm bombs on Vieques (Baruffi: 2002, 6). In the 1980s, the military began testing depleted-uranium (DU) ammunition on the island –an extremely toxic and radioactive substance. Exposure to DU has been linked to many health problems, including neurological abnormalities, leukemia, lymphoma, rashes, vision degeneration, and birth defects –many of the same health problems presented in Vieques residents (Baruffi: 2002, 6).

Vieques' island neighbor Culebra was also a victim of U.S. weapons testing starting in 1940. After much protest from Puerto Rico throughout the 1970's, the Navy removed itself from Culebra; however, the Navy then intensified its practices on Vieques (Bosque-Peréz and Morera: 2006, 215). It was not until the end of the 1970s and the early 1980s that Vieques took a strong opposition to the military's presence on the island. Among the most affected Viequenses were

the fishermen whose livelihoods were threatened by the Navy's destruction of fishing traps. Because of this, fishermen were heavily involved in political mobilizations (Baruffi: 2002, 7). In 1978, fishermen launched out to sea in an attempt to foil the Navy's practices while activists set up civil disobedience camps onshore (Bosque-Peréz and Morera: 2006, 216). From the viewpoint of the U.S. government, these protests were seen as part of a Cold War, anti-U.S. campaign, leading to the arrest and federal detention of many Viequenses. The protests of Viequenses calling for the decolonization and demilitarization of their island garnered support from the Latino and African American communities in the United States. This solidarity lies within the shared experience of abuse and degradation of these communities at the hands of United States institutions (Bosque-Pérez and Morera: 2006, 208).

Even after the Cold War ended in 1993, the United States justified their position on Vieques –it was “essential” for training for wars in Latin America, the Balkans, and the Middle East (Baver: 2006, 105). Viequenses protested against the United States' occupation on the island for many years, yet they were largely ignored. In 1999, the demilitarization movement gained international attention and momentum after two 500-pound bombs were accidentally dropped on a Viequense security guard, David Sanes Rodríguez, killing him and wounding four others: this was “the straw that broke the camel's back” (Barreto: 2002, 41). Protests and solidarity rallies erupted in the mainland United States and throughout Puerto Rico. The U.S. government was more responsive to the pressure of non-Vieques residents, including the Roman Catholic Church. With the Cold War no longer justifying the United States' presence on the island, these protests could not be portrayed as part of an anti-United States movement (Baver: 2006, 104).

After one year of mass demonstrations, the Clinton administration was forced to make a decision about the Navy's presence in Vieques. In February 2000, Clinton presented a referendum to Vieques: if the voters preferred the termination of the Navy's activities on the island, the Navy would leave by May 2003 (Ayala and Bernabe: 2007, 300). Protesters felt that three years was too long to allow the Navy to continue its activities, and mass civil disobedience ensued between May 2000 and May 2003. Approximately 1,300 people were arrested in those three years (Ayala and Bernabe: 2007, 301), including 18 Catholic priests (Baretto: 2002, 218). The Bush administration finally withdrew all activities from the island on May 1, 2003.

Analysis:

Despite the Western conception of human rights as universal and inalienable, the political status of Puerto Rico and Vieques allowed for these abuses to take place. In many ways, Puerto Rico is a colony of the United States, as the U.S. Congress has unlimited power over Puerto Rico's "external relations, the economy, customs, military powers, and other aspects of governance having to do with U.S. interests" (Bosque-Peréz and Morera: 2006, 84). While the United States outwardly supports democracy, liberty, and equality, Puerto Rican self-determination and sovereignty has been repeatedly denied by the United States.

The Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP), the *independentistas*, viewed the United States as a colonizer, benefitting from the suffering of Puerto Ricans. The PIP sought to nationalize Puerto Rico and its resources, bringing sovereignty and equality to the island. Puerto Rico as a territory on the United States does not have representation in Congress, so independence movements relied heavily on mobilizations locally and abroad. *Independentistas* from mainland Puerto Rico and Chicago became a major source of support for Viequense protests beginning in the late 1970's through 2003 (Bosque-Peréz and Morera: 2006, 300). Seen

as a threat, the U.S. government criminalized and repressed the activities of the *independentistas* in Puerto Rico and in the United States.

The legacy of military's occupation lives on in the bodies of Viequenses and in their environment. Concentrations of PCB, organochloride pesticides, DDT, and chlordane have been found in the Viequense food web (NOAA: 2006). When the Navy left in 2003, the eastern part of the island was not returned. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service designated 40% of the island, 14,573 acres, as "wilderness." If the land were classified as residential or commercial, the cleanup process would be much more stringent and expensive (Gold: 2014). Since "wilderness" implies that the land will remain untouched by humans, there is less pressure for a thorough cleanup. The cleanup process itself remains questionable. While the Navy should be following cleanup protocol outlined in the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980, the Navy engages in the open-air burning of vegetation to locate munitions, and then disposes of those munitions by detonating them (Bannan: 2015).

The Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques (CRDV) was founded in 1995 to "articulate a vision of a Navy-free Vieques" through the implementation of "demilitarization, decontamination, devolution, and (community-based, sustainable) development" (Gold: 2014). Demilitarization can be accomplished through the closure of 200 acres of remaining radar and telecommunication facilities on Vieques (Gold: 2014); Decontamination requires that the Navy cleans restores the ecology of Vieques to the way it was before the land expropriations of 1941; Devolution demands the return of all privatized land to the people of Vieques; and Development refers to sustainable economic development to address decades of economic stagnation. Years of Naval presence on the island prevented economic growth: 73.3% of Viequenses live below the federal poverty line –14.4% more impoverished

than the population of Puerto Rico (Bosque-Pérez and Morera: 2006, 215). Since the Navy's departure in 2003, tourism and real estate have become the main forms of economic stimulation. Foreign investors quickly purchased the cheap land of Vieques, creating businesses and tourism industries. As this gentrification continues, the cost of living on Vieques increases: Viequenses can no longer afford to remain on their land (Gold: 2014). 62 years after the 1941 land expropriations, Viequenses are again being displaced, but now by the economic activities of the foreign investors.

The demands of the Viequenses are simple: "return of all federally controlled lands to the people and municipality of Vieques; adequate and thorough decontamination of all land and water; demilitarization of their land; and locally controlled development" (Bannan: 2015). The ongoing lawsuit of the National Lawyers Guild against the Navy and the Defense Department demands that the U.S. government repair existing ecological damages and improve health care facilities and transportation on the island. Yet, 12 years after demilitarization, none of these demands have been met. This case could take years to reach a verdict; in the meantime, Viequenses suffer health consequences, economic disaster, and eviction.

The United States acts as a worldwide proponent of human rights, using a human rights discourse to justify the invasion of other countries; however, when the United States violates human rights, it is not held accountable. Beginning in 1941, the U.S. government undermined Viequenses' right to life, liberty, and personal security; their right to residence; their right to inviolability of the home; and their right to the preservation of health and to well-being. The consequences of these human rights violations are experienced in the ecology, health, and economy of Vieques. Viequenses lack the necessary political representation and economic ability

to improve their situation on their own. Further improvements depend on the United States' actions and the outcome of the pending NLG lawsuit –until then, la lucha sigue (Gold: 2014).

Case File: U.S. Human Rights Abuses on the Island of Vieques

1. Ayala, César J., "From Sugar Plantations to Military Bases: The U.S. Navy's Expropriations in Vieques," *Centro Journal*, The City University of New York, Vol. XIII No. I, Spring 2001.

During World War II the U.S. Federal Government took over approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of the Puerto Rican island of Vieques to build military installations. Before the 1940's, the island was composed of mostly sugar plantations owned by a few elites. In the 1920's, the price of sugar dropped drastically, causing unemployment for sugar cane farmers. Between 1930 and 1940, 26% of the population of Vieques emigrated to St. Croix or Puerto Rico. After $\frac{2}{3}$ of the island was sold to the U.S. Government, 89% of the remaining population was settled on 27% of the island's land area, onto a piece of land designated by the Federal Government for island resident relocation. The military complex is known as Roosevelt Roads, one of the largest U.S. Naval bases outside of the continental United States. It was built during WWII to house the British Navy, yet it never served that purpose. For a while, construction jobs sustained the economy of Vieques, providing jobs for its inhabitants. The activities of the Federal Government displaced the sugar cane industry, pineapple production, and cattle ranching. When the construction stopped, employment declined and Vieques found itself in an economic crisis.

This article explains the conditions that existed that allowed the U.S. Government to purchase the majority of Vieques, and its effects on the island's economy during and after World War Two. This article provides several charts displaying the land ownership of Vieques throughout the first half of the 20th century. César J. Ayala is a professor of Sociology at UCLA who specializes in development of Latin American Societies.

The article provides the basic historical framework in which the United States purchased Vieques, and its original intentions for the land. It examines the economy of the island before, during, and after its purchase.

2. Ayala, César J. and Rafael Bernabe. *Puerto Rico in the American Century*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

3. Ayala, César J. and José L. Bolívar. *Battleship Vieques: Puerto Rico from World War II to the Korean War*. Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011.

This book starts with the history of the island in the 1940's, before and after the land was purchased by the US Navy. Beginning with the island as land for sugar plantations, the book describes the process of evictions and expropriations of the land. The land of Vieques belonged to a small number of property owners. Most of the residents worked as *agregados*, who worked in the farms of the landowners and enjoyed a few rights. This system had existed since the 19th century. When the landowners sold their land to the US government, they were compensated. The *agregados*, however, lost their jobs, their houses, their crops, and received no compensation. The Navy referred to the *agregados* as squatters. Evictions began in the West in 1941 and 1942. Eastern evictions happened during 1947 and 1948. In the case that families had nowhere to go, they were relocated to an area of the island that the Navy had designated to be residential, Santa María. This was the first slum of Vieques, with families living in lots fifty by forty feet. Extreme

poverty fell on the island from 1943-1946, as the Navy had removed all methods of production from the island. In 1947, the Navy returned as a response to the Cold War. As of 1953, the traditional economy of the island had been completely destroyed (sugar, pineapple, cattle). The displaced population relied on the Navy for economic survival. In this new economy where marines and sailors were the consumers, prostitution emerged on the island.

This book fills in the gaps between the start of the island being used as a military area by the Germans during WWII through 1953 (and the conclusion briefly talks about the 60's). It goes in depth about the government of Vieques' thought-process during the expropriations and evictions of the land. César Ayala also wrote the first article that I looked at, also talking about the pre-Navy economy on the island.

This book will be helpful in explaining the history of the island from the time it was purchased to the time that the economy was completely destroyed in 1953. The Navy is shown as a kind of imperial force who ignored the cultural traditions and the traditional economy of the island. The emergence of the Navy resulted in forced relocations, slums, and racial discrimination.

4. Bannan, Natasha Lycia Ora. "Vieques 12 Years Later: Justice Delayed Is Justice Denied." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 6 May 2015. Web. 27 July 2015.
<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/natasha-lycia-ora-bannan/vieques-12-years-later-justice-delayed-is-justice-denied_b_7183564.html>

5. Barreto, Amílcar Antonio. *Vieques, the Navy, and Puerto Rican Politics*. University Press of Florida, 2002.

Barreto argues that it was the clear ethnic distinction made between Americans and Puerto Ricans that allowed the United States to commit human rights violations. Had the island been inhabited by "white" Americans, the Navy would have been less able to perform bomb testing. Throughout the 70's and 80's, Viequenses teamed up with people in Culebra, where the US was also testing weapons. The movement gained the most momentum in 1999, when Davis Sanes was killed. Barreto compares Vieques to the Hawaiian island Kaho'olawe which was also used from 1953-1990 for bomb testing. In 1990, President George Bush ended the use of the island. In 1997, a study showed that from 1985-1989, the risk of Cancer in Vieques was 27% higher than on mainland Puerto Rico. After Sanes' death, 36% of Puerto Ricans saw the Navy's presence in a negative light. The Cold War was over, and while using the island had one been somewhat justified, it was not anymore. Despite Clinton's announcement that the

This book gives extensive information on the various actors in protests: Viequenses, neighbors from the island of Culebra, revolutionary organizations (the Armed Forces of National Liberation, FALN and the Macheteros), legislators in Puerto Rico and the United States, Puerto Rican emigrants, and the Catholic Church. It discusses elements that allowed for the US Navy to operate on the island: colonialism, racism, and discrimination.

While I didn't have time to read through this book thoroughly, I must in order to understand the history of the protests. Puerto Rico does not plan on separating itself from the power of the United States, but Barreto asserts that a cultural nationalism has emerged through this struggle,

bringing together Viequenses, mainland Puerto Ricans, and Puerto Rican emigrants. Aside from long-lasting health hazards, a long-lasting identity has emerged from Vieques.

6. Baruffi, Russell. *Environmental Conflict and Cultural Solidarity: The Case of Vieques*. Thesis. Watson Institute for International Studies Brown University, 2002. Providence, RI.

7. Baver, Sherrie L. "Peace is More than the End of Bombing: The Second Stage of the Vieques Struggle," *Latin American Perspectives* Vol. 33 No. 1, January 2006.

Residents of Vieques have struggled to force out the Navy since the 1970s. During the Vietnam War, naval planners performed intense bombing practice on the island. Following the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, the struggle gained momentum. The movement adopted a more moderate framing of the issues: social and environmental injustice, human rights, continuing colonialism, and the disdain of federal officials. In 1999 David Sanes, a civilian worker, died when two F-18s accidentally dropped 500-pound bombs on him. Protests and civil disobedience finally led to the withdrawal of the navy. President Clinton issued an order in 2000 to return the military installation to civilian use. This process took more than 2 years. The local community wants the land to be decontaminated enough to allow for recreational activities, farming, and other uses. Long time residents suffer from several types of cancer, asthma, skin problems, kidney failure, and heart abnormalities. Several studies have shown high levels of metals in flora, fauna, and humans. The struggle is far from over, as Vieques residents still demand a cleanup of the affected areas and the possibility of future development on the island.

This article goes more in detail about the goals of the CRDV, the group discussed in a previous article. It goes over decontamination, devolution, and development, now that demilitarization has been accomplished.

This article provides background for the protests that grew out of various periods of bomb testing from the end of WWII to the Cold War and Vietnam. It follows the reasons for success or failure behind these protests, and concludes that the struggle is far from over so long as the residents of Vieques cannot safely live on their land. The solution depends on decontamination, devolution, and development in years to come.

8. Bosque-Pérez, Ramón and José Javier Colón Morera. *Puerto Rico Under Colonial Rule: Political Persecution and the Quest for Human Rights*. State University of New York Press, 2006.

9. Colón-Ramos, Daniel. "Letter to President Barack Obama About Vieques." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 20 Apr. 2015. Web. 27 July 2015.
<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/daniel-coloramos/letter-to-president-barack-obama-about-vieques_b_7100090.html>.

10. Gold, Liv. "In Vieques, Puerto Rico, La Lucha Sigue," NACLA, 13 October 2014, <https://nacla.org/news/vieques-puerto-rico-la-lucha-sigue>.

In June 2013, Liv Gold traveled to Vieques. The U.S. Navy's occupation on Vieques began 3 days after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, as Congress granted \$30 million to build military installations in Puerto Rico. 10,000 Viequeses were displaced in the process of purchasing 2/3 of the island. The island's location was thought to protect the Panama Canal and protect against European fascism. When the facility was finished being built, it was no longer needed, so it was used as munitions storage in the West and weapons testing grounds in the East. During the next 60 years, 18,000 tons of bombs, napalm, and Agent Orange fell on Vieques. In 1999, a civilian Viequesese was accidentally killed by two 500 pound bombs. This led to mass demonstrations with over 1500 people imprisoned. In 2003, the base was deactivated. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service designated 900 acres of eastern island as "wilderness." If the land were classified as residential or commercial, the Navy would have to pay far more for cleanup. As for cleanup, removing bombs actually means detonating them. Toxic substances from the government's activities have entered the food chain: squash, peppers, pigeon peas, and fish. Dust in residents' homes includes cadmium, arsenic, and lead. The protests were not just anti-militarist movements, but also an act to regain control of the island's economy. Unemployment was rampant during the Navy's occupation, halting domestic production of sugar cane, pineapple, fishing, cattle ranching, and agriculture. Now gentrification is happening in Vieques due to cheap land. The Committee for the Rescue and Development of Vieques (CRDV) was formed in 1995 to envision a Navy-free island. The group believes the island's future depends on demilitarization, decontamination, devolution, and development.

This article answered many questions that I still had about what Vieques looks like in more recent years. It is very critical of the Navy's cleanup "efforts" and explains some ways in which the Navy got around cleaning up certain areas (like calling a large portion of the island a "wilderness" area).

This article is useful for understanding some of the most contemporary concerns for Vieques, and the struggle for Viequeses to regain control of their land and economy.

11. Gonzalez, Juan, "Unexploded bombs litter waters of Vieques, Puerto Rico, a decade after the U.S. Navy ceased target practice," *New York Daily News*, 1 May 2013, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/gonzalez-10-years-devastation-vieques-waters-article-1.1332740>.

10 years after the U.S. Navy agreed to stop weapons testing on the island of Vieques, a deep-diving fisherman named Cacimar Zenón found an enormous undetonated bomb 80 feet deep off the coast of Vieques. Hundreds of unexploded bombs and artillery shells still reside in the waters around the island. After President George W. Bush ordered the Navy to leave Vieques, there has been a cleanup effort to clear munitions and toxic contaminants from the ¾ of the island once owned and occupied by the military. So far, \$180 million has been spent, the most expensive cleanup in military history. The Navy acknowledges it will take until 2025 to remove all environmental damage caused by weapons testing. The Navy, however, is not making an effort to address the ocean's damaged ecology. ½ of the people on Vieques live in poverty, the island has the highest cancer rates of any municipality in Puerto Rico, 34% of residents have toxic levels of mercury, 55% of residents are contaminated with lead, and 69% of residents are contaminated with arsenic.

As with the Aljazeera America article, this article implies that the remnants of bombs in the ocean are causing health problems for both the island's sea-life and for the islanders who rely on the sea-life for food. The effects of the U.S. Navy have been felt for more than a decade after it left the island and will continue to be felt perhaps indefinitely. The legacy lives on in the contaminants found in the bodies of the people who live there and the ecosystem in which they have made their lives. Already, this is the most expensive military cleanup in history. Munitions testing in inhabited areas obviously has negative effects, regardless of how much the U.S. government denies it.

12. Kim, Sung Un, "US accused of violating human rights in Puerto Rico," University of Pittsburg School of Law, 25 September 2013, <http://jurist.org/paperchase/2013/09/us-accused-of-violating-human-rights-in-puerto-rico.php>.

In September of 2013, the National Lawyers Guild filed a petition with the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights accusing the United States government of human rights violations of the island of Vieques. 10 Vieques residents who have been diagnosed with cancer or have relative who have been diagnosed with cancer filed the petition. The Guild claims that health hazards were created over the 60 years of bomb testing that has caused chronic illness for the residents of the island. The island has become polluted with toxins, so the lawyers of the NLG accuse the U.S. government with the violation of several articles of the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man. The petition seeks changes that would address existing ecological damages and improve health care and transportation on the island (as I read earlier, there are no chemotherapy facilities on Vieques). Still, there has been no accountability on the part of the United States.

The author has linked several sources within this article: the NLG website, the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man, and the websites to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), who have supposedly concluded that Navy activities did not pose any hazards. This is a great source for linking together the different aspects of the case, including the actors and their claims.

This article explains on what grounds the NLG and the people of Vieques were able to file a petition (through the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man), as well as what they perceive as justice: addressing existing ecological damages and improving health care and transportation on the island. These seem like very reasonable demands.

13. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration National Ocean Service Office of Response and Restoration and Ridolfi, Inc., "Final Data Report For The Vieques Island Biota Sampling Project," July 2006.

In June 2005, the NOAA Office of Response and Restoration investigated the land crab and the fiddler crab of Vieques island. The department searched for concentrations of explosive compounds, PCBs, organochlorine pesticides, and trace elements in these crabs. Land crabs are an extremely important part of the Vieques diet for the approximately 9,300 Puerto Ricans on the island. The fiddler crab live in similar areas to the land crab, but have a different location in

the food web. Explosive compounds were not found in either crab species. PCB compounds were detected from one sampling location. Organochlorine pesticides, mostly DDT, were found in multiple land and fiddler crab sampled. Chlordane, another pesticide, was also detected in almost all of the sampling locations. The ATSDR concluded that PCB, organochlorine pesticides, and DDE concentrations were not high enough to expect harmful health effects. Despite PCBs not being considered at high enough concentrations, it is entering the food web. The study recommends additional evaluation, especially in regard to PCBs and DDT.

I thought that this article was going to show exactly how the residents of the island are being negatively affected by remnants of weapons material in their food source. While, the results were deemed by the ATSDR to be insufficient evidence for correlating the Navy's activities and illness on the island, the fact that PCB and DDT are entering the food web is really concerning, and not something to be overlooked. The NOAA suggests additional evaluation.

I don't believe that the NOAA is falsifying results, but I also don't believe that traces of PCBs and DDT in the soft muscle of crabs essential to the diet of Viequenses is normal. Any amount of these chemicals is dangerous. I think that perhaps the recognized threshold levels of these chemicals need to be reevaluated. It's also of deep concern to keep monitoring these crabs.

14. "Public Health." *Veterans' Diseases Associated with Agent Orange* - . N.p., June 2015. Web. 27 July 2015. <<http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/conditions/index.asp>>.

15. Rangel, Charles B., "Defense Infrastructure: Environmental Cleanup of Former Naval Facilities on Vieques," United States Government Accountability Office, Report from 26 March, 2007.

In 2003, the U.S. Navy began its cleanup process, as dictated by the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980. The process is composed of a preliminary assessment, site inspection, remedial investigation and feasibility study, remedial design and remedial action, and long-term monitoring. The Government has divided Vieques into East/West. The Eastern part of the island has 20 sites to be cleaned and the Western area has 17 sites, yet the Navy concluded that 9 of the sites didn't require any cleanup at all. 9,000 acres in Eastern Vieques have been affected by munitions and explosives, and 100 acres of munitions clearance was completed in Western Vieques in 2003. Eastern Vieques seems to be the more damaged part of the island. The Navy estimated that the cost for munitions cleanup on the island would exceed \$235,296,000.

This article maps out exactly the steps the government would plan to take upon taking responsibility for the destruction of the island's ecology, even though these steps are bureaucratic and tedious.

The damage caused by weapons training has been extensive. If the Navy completes this clean up, it will stand as the most expensive military cleanup in world history. However, the system that is used by the Navy to determine whether or not they are accountable for cleaning up the mess they made is long and bureaucratic, which doesn't ever bode well for efficiency. It has already been

12 years since the Navy left Vieques, and according to other articles, there is still much to be done. That makes me believe there could be a better, faster way to clean up the island.

16. Stanchich, Maritza, PhD. "Ten Years After Ousting US Navy, Vieques Confronts Contamination." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 14 May 2013. Web. 27 July 2015. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/maritza-stanchich-phd/ten-years-after-ousting-u_b_3243449.html>.

17. "The U.S. Legacy on Vieques," Aljazeera America, 14 May 2013
<http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/insidestoryamericas/2013/05/2013514105157928258.html>.

Residents of Vieques cite cancer, birth defects and diseases as the legacy of 60 years of US weapons testing on the island. On May 1, 2003, the US government ended its bomb testing on the island. Bunkers containing bombs were simply shuttered and turned into nature reserves. [Not so] coincidentally, Vieques islanders have significantly higher rates of cancer, hypertension, and kidney failure than the rest of Puerto Rico, something that they attribute to the decades of weapons testing. Residents of Vieques have a 30% higher cancer rate than the rest of Puerto Rico and four times the rate of hypertension. Women of child bearing age on the island are more contaminated than women in Puerto Rico, 27% of which have enough mercury in their bodies to cause neurological damage to their unborn babies. The island doesn't have chemotherapy facilities, so cancer patients must travel for hours by plane or ferry for treatment. Seafood is an important part of the diet on Vieques, however bomb remnants in the coral are passing onto crustaceans and fish that are eaten by humans. The U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry denies that past military activities have contaminated the air, water, soil, plants, or seafood. The U.S. Navy says that they have cleared more than 2,500 acres, removed approximately 17 million pounds of scrap metal, and destroyed 38,000 munitions items. The Navy is firm in its position that there are no health risks to the residents of the island.

This article does a good job of implying the link between U.S. bombing and health risks: "For more than 60 years, the Navy was bombing us with many poisons, napalm, agent orange, depleted uranium and many other things, some of which we may never know definitively," says Norma Torres Sanes, a civil disobedient in the fight against foreign military presence in Vieques. Napalm, agent orange, and uranium are known to be hazardous to human health, yet the U.S. government continues to deny that they are responsible for any damages to the ecology or human health on the island.

This article touches on the biological consequences of weapons testing on Vieques, including cancer, hypertension, kidney failure, and birth defects. It is presented as an ongoing struggle between the residents of the island and the U.S. government for U.S. accountability and cleaning up the island, perhaps also covering health care costs for the people affected by the hazardous wastes dumped on them by the U.S: "In 2009, ATSDR again investigated whether there were any health hazards associated with the Navy's use of Vieques. In December 2011, ATSDR released its summary report for public comment and, in March 2013, reaffirmed its findings that there is no scientific evidence of any health hazards associated with the Navy's use of Vieques."