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THE OTHER SIDE OF EL YUNQUE

Histories and stories of a community in an enchanted forest, incorporating a timeline of a diverse community and its people—including artists in the area as well as across the island

Introduction

This manuscript began not as a formal historical study, but as a labor of love—an evolving artwork shaped through memory, observation, friendship, landscape, and time. Many years ago, while spending time in the mountains and rainforests of Cubuy and the southern slopes of El Yunque, I began to feel that something extraordinary was unfolding quietly within these lands. There was a depth to the place that extended far beyond its beauty. Stories seemed to emerge from rivers, trails, gardens, ruins, old roads, storms, conversations, and chance

encounters. The rainforest did not feel passive or distant; it felt alive, almost conscious—a place where memory itself remained suspended in the landscape.

Over time, I became increasingly fascinated not only by the ecological richness of Cubuy, but by the lives that had intersected there across generations: Taíno histories, jíbaro families, spiritual seekers, artists, hikers, caretakers, cooks, conservationists, teachers, musicians, architects, collectors, and travelers who had all, in different ways, been transformed by this environment. Some arrived searching for solitude, others for inspiration, healing, adventure, or belonging. Many found far more than they expected.

As an artist whose work has long centered around memory, transformation, layered histories, and the emotional life of objects and places, I slowly realized that Cubuy itself functioned almost like a living artwork—a continuously evolving archive composed of stories, gestures, traces, rituals, ruins, photographs, rivers, and oral histories. I began documenting what I could: conversations, hikes, houses, gardens, waterfalls, petroglyphs, friendships, storms, and the remarkable coincidences that seemed to repeatedly connect people across time and place.

Again and again, moments occurred that felt too precise, too poetic, or too emotionally charged to dismiss as simple coincidence. Artists unknowingly retracing the footsteps of other artists decades later. Stories resurfacing through unexpected encounters. Objects reappearing after years. Places described long before being discovered in person. The rainforest itself often seemed to orchestrate these connections, quietly weaving together memory, history, intuition, and experience.

This project is therefore not only about documenting Cubuy historically, but about honoring the invisible relationships between people, landscape, spirituality, creativity, and memory. Nature here becomes more than scenery—it becomes healer, teacher, protector, collaborator, and sacred presence. The rainforest exists simultaneously as ecological system, spiritual territory, artistic inspiration, and emotional refuge.

What follows is not intended to be a definitive history. It is instead an attempt to preserve fragments before they disappear: oral histories, personal experiences, local legends, family stories, cultural memory, photographs, ecological knowledge, and moments of beauty and mystery that might otherwise fade quietly into the forest itself.

Some sections are deeply researched; others remain incomplete, evolving through conversations and recollections still waiting to be gathered. In many

ways, this manuscript mirrors the rainforest it describes—layered, alive, imperfect, expanding, and filled with hidden paths still left to explore.

Above all, I hope these pages allow readers to feel something of what so many of us have felt in Cubuy: that certain places possess a rare and almost unexplainable power to transform the people who enter them.

El Yunque and Naguabo

El Yunque and Naguabo

El Yunque, one of Puerto Rico's most treasured wonders, is a sanctuary of mist and mystery—a paradise for nature lovers and seekers of enchantment. Spanning over 28,000 lush, emerald acres, this rainforest invites all to wander its winding trails, swim in its crystalline waters, marvel at its vibrant wildlife, and lose themselves in its ancient rhythms.[1] Its legacy is layered: sacred to the Taíno people, shaped by centuries of Spanish forestry, and lovingly preserved by modern conservationists. What we now know as El Yunque National Forest has meant many things to many people—from the sacred seat of the Taíno god Yúcahu to a strategic reconnaissance point during World War II.[2] As the meanings of this mountain and its surrounding forest and communities have evolved, its mysteries only deepen, while its natural beauty remains eternally timeless.

In 1513, Spanish Viceroy Diego Colón ordered the creation of a settlement at the mouth of the Río Daguao, naming it Santiago de Daguao.[3] Designed as a military outpost, its purpose was to defend against attacks from indigenous groups in the region. However, the settlement was short-lived. Just a year later, in 1514, King Ferdinand the Catholic ordered its abandonment, and soon after, it was destroyed by coordinated resistance from Taíno and Carib communities.[4] One historical account mentions the death of Cristóbal de Guzmán, a Spanish figure killed during an indigenous assault on a nearby livestock operation. The area held strategic importance as the territory of the Taíno leader, or cacique, Daguao—sometimes referred to as Yukibo—who led these resistance efforts.[5] The name Daguao itself is believed to mean "land rich in water," reflecting both the region's natural abundance and its symbolic importance.

Santiago de Daguao was located at the mouth of the Río Daguao, a spot that today serves as the boundary between the modern municipalities of Naguabo and Ceiba.[6] Although the original settlement existed for only about a year, it played a significant role in shaping Spanish colonial priorities in Puerto Rico's

eastern region. After the settlement's failure, the area became a hub for smuggling and illicit trade, frequently used by Dutch, French, and English powers. This activity prompted the Spanish Crown to seek more durable colonial footholds in the area. The town of Naguabo was officially founded in 1794 and later relocated between 1821 and 1822, becoming the long-term settlement that persists today.[7]

Though Santiago de Daguao's existence was brief, it stands as one of the earliest Spanish attempts to colonize Puerto Rico's east coast. Its downfall highlights the intense resistance mounted by indigenous groups and the broader challenges faced by early colonial forces. In the long run, the settlement's failure helped redirect Spanish efforts, laying the groundwork for the eventual development of Naguabo centuries later.

Naguabo is affectionately called *El Pueblo de los Enchumbaos*—The Town of the Drenched—because of the rain that so often falls from its skies, a gift also fed by its many rivers and creeks.[8] In the 20th century, particularly during the Prohibition era, smugglers frequently used the town's port to bring in contraband, often having to wade through the water to offload their cargo from ships—hence the nickname.

Though El Yunque touches many municipalities, the town of Naguabo, cradled on its southeastern flank, shares a particularly intimate relationship with the forest. Naguabo lies where the mountains meet the sea, blessed by the forest's generous rainfall and the serene beauty that reigns high above the enchanted mountains in neighborhoods like Barrio Cubuy, where rivers such as the Río Blanco and Río Sabana flow from the highlands into the lower parts of Naguabo. These waterways play a vital role in the region's ecology and water supply, nourishing the land and the lives it sustains.[9]

High above, in neighborhoods like Barrio Cubuy, this relationship becomes even more profound.

Footnotes

1. U.S. Forest Service, El Yunque National Forest historical and ecological overview.
2. Historical records regarding military observation and strategic use of El Yunque during World War II; Taíno mythology sources concerning Yúcahu.
3. Salvador Brau, *Historia de Puerto Rico*; Spanish colonial settlement records concerning Santiago de Daguao (1513).

4. Historical accounts of Taíno and Carib resistance in eastern Puerto Rico during the early colonial period.
5. Historical references to the Daguao cacicazgo and eastern Taíno leadership in Puerto Rico.
6. Municipal and colonial geographic records concerning the Río Daguao region and eastern Puerto Rico.
7. Municipal historical records of Naguabo and Puerto Rican colonial administrative archives.
8. Local histories and oral traditions concerning the nickname *El Pueblo de los Enchumbaos* and Prohibition-era smuggling activity in Naguabo.
9. Hydrological and ecological studies of the Río Blanco and Río Sabana watersheds within the El Yunque and Naguabo regions.

The Other Side of El Yunque: Barrio Cubuy

(add image)

Most who visit El Yunque enter through its northern face—via Río Grande, Fajardo, or Luquillo. Yet few venture to the forest's southern soul, where Naguabo offers a gateway to another world, a quieter, more mystical passage along the storied Road PR191.[1] This road is more than asphalt—it is a path through time, bordered by towering green walls, mystical waterfalls and skies lit with magical fireflies. Along the way, Yukiyú and ancient Taíno histories speak in stone petroglyphs sprinkled through the forest, and the land hums with stories both old and new.[2]

This is a side of El Yunque less traveled, but no less profound. Here, the forest feels more personal, more sacred—its spirit reflected in the people who have lived along highway191, each touched by its magic. Their tales are rooted in the soil, sung by the rivers and coquis, and carried on the wind that rustles the canopy above.

In honoring this path—this other side of El Yunque—we also share the history of Highway 191, its surroundings, and, most especially, Barrio Cubuy: a community bound not merely by geography, but by a deep and enduring kinship with the forest and its mysterious, inspiring ways. It is a living story of harmony, privacy, isolation, resilience, and reverence—where nature, art, and culture intertwine like flamboyán and yagrumo trees, rooted deeply in the earth yet always reaching toward the light.

Before the Construction of Road PR-191

(add image)

El Yunque National Forest, one of the oldest reserves in the Western Hemisphere, boasts a rich history shaped by indigenous populations, Spanish and American rule, and ongoing conservation efforts.[3] Long before the construction of PR-191, the forest already stood as a place of both reverence and resource—its meaning shifting across centuries while its physical presence endured.

Originally designated in 1876 by Spanish King Alfonso XII as a forest reserve, the intention was pragmatic: to protect water sources, regulate timber extraction, and preserve soil integrity.[4] Yet even this early act of conservation acknowledged something deeper—that this landscape was not merely exploitable land, but a vital system requiring stewardship.

Under United States administration, following 1898, the forest became the Luquillo Forest Reserve in 1903, later renamed the Caribbean National Forest in 1935, and finally restored to its culturally resonant name, El Yunque National Forest, in 2007.[5] Each renaming reflects a shift—not only in governance, but in identity, ownership, and meaning.

Pre-Columbian Era and Indigenous Significance

(add image

Long before colonial intervention, the Taíno people inhabited the Luquillo Mountains, developing a deep and reciprocal relationship with the forest.[6] For over a thousand years, El Yunque was not simply a place—it was a sacred presence.

They believed the peak of El Yunque to be the dwelling place of Yúcahu, their principal deity—a god of agriculture, peace, and fertility.[7] In their cosmology, the mountain was alive with spirit. The forest was not separate from human life, but interwoven with it.

The Taíno lived in organized communities known as yukayekes, led by caciques, and practiced agriculture centered on crops such as yucca and maize. Their worldview was animistic: rivers, trees, stones, and mountains were inhabited by

spirits.[8] This understanding left a visible imprint on the landscape—petroglyphs carved into rock surfaces across El Yunque and areas surrounding what would later become PR-191 and Barrio Cubuy.[9]

These markings remain today—not only as archaeological artifacts, but as active presences, reminders that the forest has always been a place of meaning, not just terrain.

Spanish Era (1493–1898)

(add image)

With the arrival of the Spanish in 1493, this balance was disrupted

Colonization brought mining, agriculture, forced labor, and the systematic dismantling of Taíno life.[10] El Yunque, once a sanctuary, became a site of extraction. The forest's resources—its timber, its minerals, its fertile lands—were absorbed into colonial systems of production.

The Taíno population declined rapidly due to disease, violence, and the encomienda system. Yet even as their numbers diminished, their cultural imprint endured—embedded in language, in agricultural knowledge, in spiritual practices, and in the land itself.[11]

By the 19th century, the region around Naguabo reflected this transformation. Colonial farms, cattle ranching, and sugarcane cultivation spread across accessible areas, while mining operations extracted copper, iron, and traces of gold.[12] Still, the higher elevations—particularly areas like what is now Barrio Cubuy—remained largely inaccessible, resistant to full occupation.

In 1876, King Alfonso XII established the Luquillo Forest Reserve to safeguard the forest and emphasizing soil and water conservation and timber management.[13] This marked an early step towards formal protection of the area.

American Era (1898–Present)

(add image)

Following the Spanish-American War, the United States assumed control of Puerto Rico, bringing new administrative systems and a growing interest in conservation.[14]

The early 20th century marked a turning point. Figures such as Theodore Roosevelt—a central advocate for conservation—played a role in formalizing protection efforts.[15] The forest was expanded through a combination of land purchases, grants, and policy, eventually encompassing over 20,000 acres by 1935.

Yet even conservation carried complexity. Protection preserved the forest, but also redefined how people could access and inhabit it. What had once been lived-in terrain became regulated space.

Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC): Infrastructure and Access

(add image)

Between 1933 and 1942, the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) fundamentally reshaped El Yunque—not by altering its essence, but by making it accessible.[16]

The CCC constructed trails, roads, bridges, and recreational infrastructure, including early segments of what would become PR-191.[17] These were not merely functional developments—they were the first formal gestures of opening the forest to broader public experience.

The trails built during this period became the skeletal framework of access into the Cubuy and Río Blanco regions:

- **Río Sabana Trail** — built in the 1930s, later reopened in 2011, connecting deep forest routes to the southern extension of PR-191.[18]
- **Tradewinds Trail** — a rugged path traversing the El Toro Wilderness, linking multiple interior systems.[19]
- **La Coca Trail** — dense, challenging, defined by water crossings and thick vegetation.[20]
- **La Mina Trail** — once one of the most visited routes, leading to La Mina Falls (currently closed post-Hurricane Maria).[21]

• **Big Tree Trail** — a more accessible interpretive path through tabonuco forest, also affected by the 2017 hurricane.[22]

These trails preceded the road. They were the first arteries through which movement, knowledge, and eventually community would flow.

Modern Era: Research, Conservation, and Vulnerability

(add image)

Today, El Yunque stands as a site of global ecological importance. Recognized as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, it serves as a living laboratory for studying biodiversity, climate systems, and the "critical zone" of Earth's surface—the thin layer where life, water, soil, and atmosphere interact.[23]

At the same time, the forest remains vulnerable.

The devastation caused by Hurricane Maria in 2017 revealed both the fragility and resilience of this ecosystem. Entire sections of forest were altered overnight. Trails disappeared. Access was lost. And yet, regeneration began almost immediately.[24]

El Yunque and its communities continue to evolve—scientifically, environmentally, and culturally—holding within them both the memory of what they have been and the uncertainty of what they will become.[25]

Footnotes

Footnotes

1. Puerto Rico highway and regional geography records relating to PR-191 and southeastern access routes into El Yunque National Forest.
2. Puerto Rico Institute of Culture archaeological documentation on Taíno petroglyphs and oral histories associated with El Yunque and Río Blanco.
3. U.S. Forest Service historical overview of El Yunque National Forest and the Luquillo Mountains.
4. Spanish colonial forestry decrees under King Alfonso XII establishing the Luquillo Forest Reserve in 1876.
5. U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service records regarding the Luquillo Forest Reserve (1903), Caribbean National Forest designation (1935), and restoration of the El Yunque name in 2007.

6. Ricardo Alegría, *Ball Courts and Ceremonial Plazas in the West Indies*; Irving Rouse, *The Taínos: Rise and Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus*.
7. José Juan Arrom, *Mitología y Artes Prehispánicas de las Antillas*; Ramón Pané's early accounts of Taíno cosmology.
8. Irving Rouse, *The Taínos: Rise and Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus*.
9. Puerto Rico Institute of Culture archaeological records documenting petroglyph sites in eastern Puerto Rico and the El Yunque region.
10. Fernando Picó, *Historia General de Puerto Rico*; Francisco Moscoso, writings on colonial Puerto Rico and the encomienda system.
11. Contemporary studies on Taíno cultural survivals in Puerto Rican language, agriculture, and spirituality.
12. Historical records concerning mining, ranching, and agricultural expansion in eastern Puerto Rico during the 18th and 19th centuries.
13. Spanish forestry conservation policies concerning the Luquillo Forest Reserve, 1876.
14. Historical records related to the Spanish-American War and the transition of Puerto Rico to U.S. administration.
15. Theodore Roosevelt conservation policy archives and early U.S. Forest Service land conservation efforts in Puerto Rico.
16. U.S. Forest Service historical archives on the Civilian Conservation Corps in Puerto Rico and El Yunque.
17. Historical development records for PR-191 and El Yunque recreational infrastructure.
18. U.S. Forest Service Río Sabana Trail restoration documentation and trail history records.
19. El Toro Wilderness and Tradewinds Trail descriptions, U.S. Forest Service publications.
20. El Yunque National Forest trail guides and ecological descriptions of La Coca Trail.
21. U.S. Forest Service notices regarding La Mina Trail closures and Hurricane Maria recovery efforts.
22. Big Tree Trail interpretive information and post-hurricane ecological assessments.
23. UNESCO Biosphere Reserve program documentation and ecological studies related to El Yunque National Forest.
24. Scientific studies and U.S. Forest Service reports on Hurricane Maria's ecological impact on El Yunque.
25. Contemporary environmental and conservation studies concerning El Yunque and surrounding communities.

A Brief Account of the Taíno: First Inhabitants of El Yunque and the Cubuy Region

A representation of the Taino deity Yúcahu, a guardian of the Taino that was said to reign from his throne on the El Yunque peak.

Long before European contact, the indigenous Taíno people were the first known inhabitants of the island, and El Yunque held a central place in both their mythology and daily life. They considered the area sacred, and it played a profound role in their spirituality, cosmology, and survival. For over a thousand years, the Taíno revered the Luquillo Mountains, where El Yunque is situated, developing a deep understanding of the forest's resources, rhythms, and mysteries.[1]

The Taíno believed that the peak of El Yunque was the home of the god Yúcahu. Yúcahu Bagua Maórocoti—the full ceremonial name often attributed to the Taíno god of agriculture, peace, fertility, and abundance—was sometimes simply referred to as Yúcahu or Yukiyú. He was considered their chief deity and protector, a benevolent spiritual force who watched over the island and its people.[2] The origins of the name "El Yunque" remain debated. Some scholars and oral traditions connect the name to this powerful deity, while others believe it stems from the Taíno word *Yuke*, meaning "white lands," a poetic reference to the ever-present fog and clouds that shroud the mountain's peak.[3]

Before 1511, Taíno indigenous groups—particularly the Daguao cacicazgo—inhabited and controlled much of the eastern region of El Yunque and Puerto Rico.[4] Much like the gods of Mount Olympus in Greek mythology, Yúcahu was believed to dwell atop El Yunque, where he protected the Taíno people by battling Guabancex, the powerful goddess of chaos, storms, and hurricanes. According to Taíno belief, Yúcahu would break apart her storms before they could devastate the island.[5] In time, however, Yúcahu's protection could not shield his people from the arrival of the Spanish, though his mountain sanctuary

would continue to serve as a refuge for both people and fragments of their culture.

The Taíno practiced agriculture, cultivating crops such as yucca, corn, sweet potatoes, peppers, and tropical fruits. They also fished and hunted throughout the rivers, forests, and coastal areas of the island. Deeply connected to nature, the Taíno were animists, believing that spirits lived within rivers, caves, stones, trees, mountains, and storms. Their communities, known as *yukayekes*, were led by chiefs called *caciques*, who governed both politically and spiritually.[6]

Throughout El Yunque and areas surrounding Barrio Cubuy, the Taíno left behind petroglyphs carved into stones near rivers and forest paths, sharing fragments of their culture, spirituality, and mysteries with both the past and present. Many of these symbols remain today, quietly embedded within the landscape like ancestral echoes.[7] Time passed, and for centuries very little changed in the Taíno way of life within El Yunque until the arrival of the Spanish. The year 1493 marked the beginning of the end for the Taíno as a distinct civilization, as disease, violent conflict, enslavement, and forced labor rapidly devastated the indigenous population.[8]

Upon their arrival, Spanish colonists subjugated the Taíno people, forcing many into labor and subjecting them to brutal conditions. This included the appropriation of Taíno lands and resources, including El Yunque itself, which had long been sacred to them. Spanish colonization of the region led to mining, agriculture, military expansion, and settlement, all of which deeply impacted both the Taíno population and the island's environment.[9]

The Spanish–Taíno War of San Juan–Borikén in 1511 (see Wikipedia insert below) was one of the first major conflicts to take place in Borikén, present-day Puerto Rico. Agüeybaná II became increasingly dissatisfied with the *encomienda*system and the forced land acquisitions imposed upon his people after agreements made during the leadership of his predecessor. Several confrontations arose between the Taíno and the Spanish colonizers. Despite the Taíno's numerical advantage and deep knowledge of the terrain, the Spaniards—led by Juan Ponce de León—initially prevailed through superior weaponry, armor, horses, and military tactics.[10]

Though much of Taíno society was ultimately dismantled, their legacy continues to live throughout Puerto Rico—in language, food, music, spirituality, place names, traditions, and collective memory. In places like El Yunque and Barrio Cubuy, their presence can still be felt in the rivers, forests, stones, and stories that continue to shape the spirit of the land.[11]

(The following is from Wikipedia. Might be interesting to link it to expand on the current theme)

The **Spanish and Taíno War of San Juan–Borikén**, also known as the **Taíno Rebellion of 1511**,[a] was the first major conflict to take place in Borikén, modern-day Puerto Rico, after the arrival of the Spaniards on November 19, 1493.

After the death of Agüeybaná I, the Taíno high chief who struck the initial peace agreement with Spanish conquistador Juan Ponce de León in 1508, Agüeybaná II rose to power. Beginning his reign amidst native dissatisfaction with the *encomiendas* system and the acquisition of land territory that his predecessor allowed, the new leader soon formed a coalition that included several southern caciques, such as Urayoán, Coxiguex, Yauco, Jumacao, Loquillo, Orocobix, Guayama, and "Luis" among several others, and declared war on the European settlers.[3] The first act of war carried out by the Taínos was the execution of Cristóbal de Sotomayor, a high-ranking Spanish officer, and the burning of his settlement. From this point onward, the conflict took place in stages, the first being an open confrontation where both sides clashed.[4] Two such confrontations took place in 1511 with the Spaniards, led by Ponce de León, winning the initial confrontations despite the numeric advantage of the Taínos.

Throughout 1512, Spanish commanders Juan Cerón and Miguel Díaz led a series of horseback incursions into the territory of the ruling Caciques, destroying their villages (known as *yucayeques*) and taking as many slaves as possible in the process.[5] The ensuing Spanish counteroffensive was characterized by both political and economic motives, which would allow the mining of resources, such as gold, in their domains and the sale of natives as slaves.[3] In March of that year, they focused on a cacique that they renamed "Alonso" in the central region of Otoao.[5] During the following months, Humacao, Guayama, and Orocobix were targeted.[5] On May 15, 1512, Juan Godínez led a new Spanish incursion against the Taíno.[6] In total, the Spanish carried out 18 attacks against the Taíno during this year.[6]

In early 1513, the conquistadores targeted the domains of Cociguex, Yauco, Abey, and the renamed "Luis", managing control of the region.[7] The natives then employed guerrilla tactics, constantly moving throughout their offensives and moving in and out of Borikén/San Juan in canoes as necessary.[3] The Taíno launched a counteroffensive from a base in the Daguao, in the eastern half of the main island, managing to burn down the Spanish capital of Caparra. In turn, Orocobix's domain was under siege for five consecutive months, from May to September.[8] In September 1513, the conquistadores entered the domain of Hayuya twice.[8] "Alonso" and Orocovis were also targeted.[9] That same month, the Spanish made another incursion into Otoao.[8] During that year, the local Spanish carried out 23 incursions against the natives, and viceroy Diego Colón ordered additional retaliatory attacks after the Taínos burned down the settlement of Caparra.[6]

Between 1514 and 1515, the Spanish made advances into the Daguao, pushing the Taínos to seek refuge in the Lesser Antilles, with the presence of Agüeybana II being reported at Guadeloupe. The last report of a Taíno that could have been the High Chief was made in 1518, after which he disappears from the record. Attacks carried out by exiled Taínos and their associates from neighboring islands extended through the 1520s, finally stopping in 1529.[10]

Background

Agüeybana's domain

The royal family that ruled over most of Borikén, now known as Puerto Rico, during the pre-Columbian Taíno period used the honorific "Agüeybana" a title that was akin to "High Chief", which has been translated as the European concept of "king" in some English sources,[11][12] and that also doubled as a family name.[13][b] The title itself carried notable sociological and communal connotations, with its holder being revered and given utmost respect among the population.[16] The Agüeybana family lived in Cayabo, located in the southern regio…… (THERE IS A LOT MORE on this subject to explore)

The arrival of the Spanish brought devastating diseases such as smallpox, to which the Taíno had no immunity. Combined with ongoing violent conflict, enslavement, and forced labor under the *encomienda* system, the Taíno population rapidly declined. By the mid-16th century, they were widely believed to have disappeared as a distinct people.[12]

However, Taíno heritage endured through intermarriage with Africans and Europeans, and many cultural elements—such as language, agricultural practices, and spiritual beliefs—were preserved in rural communities, particularly in Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba.[13]

While some Taíno women were forced into relationships with Spanish men, these were often neither voluntary nor equal partnerships. Rape and sexual exploitation were, unfortunately, common. Over time, this intermingling led to a mixed population with European, African, and Taíno ancestry.[14]

The legacy of this period is still evident today. Many Puerto Ricans carry Taíno genetic heritage, many believe especially in regions such as El Yunque. Taíno revivalist communities have emerged in Puerto Rico and beyond, and recent genetic studies and cultural revitalization efforts have challenged the long-held narrative of total extinction, affirming that the Taíno legacy remains alive in the Caribbean.[15]

Meanwhile, in El Yunque, loggers, miners, and farmers were quickly populating the area, gradually replacing much of its ancient indigenous culture with colonial systems of labor and extraction. Forests were cleared for timber, charcoal production, subsistence farming, cattle ranching, and agriculture. Rivers became routes for transportation and resource extraction, while isolated mountain communities slowly emerged throughout the region.[16]

(NEED TO ELABORATE MORE ABOUT THIS: the culture of loggers, miners, farmers, deforestation, coffee growers, charcoal production, mountain isolation, jíbaro culture, oral traditions, and the eventual second-growth regeneration of El Yunque.)

The culture of these early mountain settlers was deeply tied to the rhythms of the forest. Farmers cultivated coffee, sugar cane, tobacco, bananas, root vegetables, and tropical fruits on steep hillsides carved into the rainforest. Woodcutters harvested valuable hardwoods, while miners searched for copper, iron, and traces of gold in the mountains and riverbeds. Life in these remote areas was often physically demanding and isolated, shaped by muddy roads, heavy rainfall, oral traditions, folk medicine, Catholic beliefs blended with

African and indigenous influences, and a profound dependence on the land itself.[17]

Large portions of the original forest were cut during the Spanish colonial period and into the early American era. Yet over time, as agriculture declined in many mountainous regions and conservation measures increased, much of El Yunque regenerated naturally through secondary forest growth. Today, many areas that appear ancient are in fact forests that regrew over former farmland, logging zones, and abandoned settlements.[18]

During Spanish colonial times, colonial farms, cattle ranching, and sugar cane cultivation were active. In 1828, Naguabo produced approximately 1,400 quintales of sugar from 21 trapiches, operated about five rum stills, and exported coffee. Mining of copper, iron, and gold was also carried out until the late 19th century.[19]

In 1876, Alfonso XII designated El Yunque Peak and the surrounding forest a "crown reserve," to safeguard the forest while emphasizing soil and water conservation and timber management.[20] This marked an early step toward formal protection of the area.

Theodore Roosevelt—who was the first U.S. president to visit Puerto Rico, while his eldest son, Theodore Roosevelt Jr., would later be installed as Puerto Rico's governor in 1929—was a leading figure in the early conservation movement.[21] Under American administration, the government moved swiftly to designate the area as a protected site, initially calling it the "Luquillo Forest Reserve." Within a few years, the name was changed to the "Luquillo National Forest." Thanks to a combination of private donations, government land grants, and the purchase of privately held tracts, the forest saw significant expansion. By 1935, it encompassed over 20,000 acres. Reflecting its growing importance within the U.S. national forest system, it eventually received a new name: "The Caribbean National Forest."[22]

El Yunque has been recognized as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, highlighting its global importance for biodiversity and conservation.[23] The forest continues to be a popular destination for recreation, research, and ecological study.

El Yunque, the only tropical rainforest in the U.S. National Forest System, holds deep significance for both Taíno and Puerto Rican culture.[24] It was a sacred space for the Taíno people, and its natural beauty continues to inspire.

Footnotes

1. Ricardo Alegría, *Ball Courts and Ceremonial Plazas in the West Indies*; U.S. Forest Service historical material on El Yunque.
2. José Juan Arrom, *Mitología y Artes Prehispánicas de las Antillas*.
3. Cayetano Coll y Toste, historical writings on Puerto Rican place names and Taíno etymology.
4. Salvador Brau, *Historia de Puerto Rico*; accounts of the Daguao cacicazgo in eastern Puerto Rico.
5. Taíno oral mythology recorded by early chroniclers including Ramón Pané.
6. Irving Rouse, *The Taínos: Rise and Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus*.
7. Puerto Rico Institute of Culture archaeological records; petroglyph sites near Río Blanco and eastern Puerto Rico.
8. Francisco Moscoso, writings on Taíno decline after Spanish colonization.
9. Fernando Picó, *Historia General de Puerto Rico*.
10. Historical accounts of the 1511 Taíno rebellion and the Spanish–Taíno War of San Juan–Borikén.
11. Contemporary studies on Taíno cultural survivals in Puerto Rican identity, language, and traditions.
12. Historical studies on disease, forced labor, and demographic collapse among indigenous Caribbean populations following European contact.
13. Anthropological and historical studies concerning Taíno cultural continuity in Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic.
14. Historical and sociological studies concerning colonial racial mixing, gender violence, and early Caribbean society.
15. Recent mitochondrial DNA and genetic studies on Puerto Rican and Caribbean populations indicating Taíno ancestry and cultural revitalization movements.
16. Historical accounts of logging, mining, settlement, and agricultural expansion in the El Yunque and Luquillo Mountain regions.
17. Rural mountain culture studies in eastern Puerto Rico, including oral traditions, folk medicine, subsistence farming, and coffee cultivation.
18. Ecological and forestry studies documenting secondary forest regeneration in Puerto Rico and El Yunque during the 20th century.
19. Historical economic and agricultural records of Naguabo during the Spanish colonial period.
20. Spanish forestry decrees establishing the Luquillo Forest Reserve in 1876.
21. Historical records concerning Theodore Roosevelt and Theodore Roosevelt Jr. in Puerto Rico.
22. U.S. Forest Service records concerning the Luquillo Forest Reserve, Caribbean National Forest designation, and forest expansion policies.

23. UNESCO Biosphere Reserve documentation and ecological studies related to El Yunque National Forest.
24. U.S. Forest Service publications describing El Yunque as the only tropical rainforest in the U.S. National Forest System.

Construction of Road PR-191

As mentioned before, the Taíno Daguao cacicazgo inhabited the area around PR-191 before Spanish colonization, specifically prior to 1511.[1] The Daguao cacicazgo was a pre-Columbian Taíno chiefdom in southeastern Puerto Rico, led by a cacique named Daguao whose name has survived in local geography. It represents an important part of the island's indigenous heritage, especially in the region around Naguabo. Many place names in Puerto Rico—such as Cubuy, Humacao, Yabucoa, and Daguao—are Taíno in origin, preserving a linguistic and cultural bridge to the island's pre-Columbian past.[2] The story of Daguao connects the indigenous geography to modern identities, particularly in southeastern Puerto Rico. Some historians believe the name Naguabo itself may be a linguistic transformation or corruption of Daguao.[3]

The Taíno were agricultural people, cultivating yucca and corn, and living in communal villages called *yukayekes* under the leadership of a *cacique*. As animists, they saw the divine within nature itself, leaving behind petroglyphs throughout El Yunque—a sacred landscape inscribed with spiritual meaning.[4] Their way of life remained largely unchanged until 1493, when Spanish colonization began. With it came disease, violence, displacement, and forced labor. El Yunque, once a sanctuary, became increasingly exploited for mining, farming, and settlement, its lands and people profoundly altered. The Taíno culture, though deeply rooted, was nearly erased. The Spanish colonized the regions surrounding El Yunque, leading to mining and agriculture that further impacted the remaining indigenous population.[5]

By Spanish colonial times, the general area was largely occupied by colonial farms and cattle ranches, with active sugarcane cultivation. Rum stills and coffee growers operated throughout the Naguabo region, alongside the mining of copper, iron, and gold. Small deposits of these metals were extracted until the late 19th century, though mining declined by the early 20th century.[6] The high-altitude zones far above the steep mountain slopes—particularly around what is now Barrio Cubuy—remained inaccessible, isolated, and only sparsely occupied or cultivated. The dense rainforest, constant humidity, steep ravines, and lack of roads made permanent settlement difficult, preserving parts of the forest in relative isolation long after the coastal and lower valleys had been transformed.[7]

According to records from the British consulate, Naguabo played a key role in international trade during the 19th century, particularly between 1849 and 1880.[8] Its prominence made it essential to establish roads and transportation routes linking different sectors of Naguabo to its port. During this period, Puerto Rico had a total of twelve official ports of entry, and Naguabo stood out as one of the most populous and strategically important in the eastern region.

The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) played a significant role in developing El Yunque between 1933 and 1942, constructing trails, roads—including portions of PR-191—as well as bridges, observation points, and recreational facilities.[9] Their work fundamentally altered access to the forest, transforming what had once been an isolated mountainous wilderness into a navigable public landscape.

Some of the trails built by the CCC during the 1930s served as early infrastructure before PR-191 reached its full extension.[10] The earliest named trails in the Cubuy and Río Blanco region connected through what is today PR-191 were the Río Sabana and Tradewinds Trails, accompanied by access routes such as La Coca, La Mina, and Big Tree. Built during the 1930s by the CCC, these trails formed the backbone of early access into Cubuy and Río Blanco's forested hinterlands—long before formal highway construction reached those remote mountains.

• Río Sabana Trail — Built in the 1930s and reopened in 2011, its trailhead is located at the Recreation Area on the southern extension of PR-191 in Naguabo. Originally used as an access route through what is now the El Toro Wilderness, it connected interior forest routes with PR-191.[11]

• Tradewinds Trail — A long, rugged trail traversing the El Toro Wilderness, linking the southern Río Sabana Trail with broader trail systems leading deeper into El Yunque.[12]

Additionally, several trailheads beginning along PR-191 were built by the CCC during that era:

• La Coca Trail — A challenging trail known for dense rainforest, stream crossings, and muddy terrain.[13]

• La Mina Trail — A moderate-to-difficult trail beginning near the Palo Colorado Visitor Center and leading to La Mina Falls, one of El Yunque's most iconic waterfalls. It has remained closed since Hurricane Maria.[14]

• Big Tree Trail — A paved self-guided interpretive trail passing through groves of towering tabonuco trees and ending near La Mina Falls. It was also heavily affected by the 2017 hurricane.[15]

Before the 1953 renumbering, the route that became PR-191 existed as a collection of local rural roads, dirt paths, and early paved routes dating back to the Spanish colonial era and early American infrastructure efforts.[16] Formal route numbers below 100 were used before standardization, and PR-191 did not exist as a designated corridor until the highway system reorganization of 1953.

Puerto Rico Highway 191 (PR-191) is a winding rural road that serves as one of the principal gateways into El Yunque National Forest. This scenic two-lane route carries deep historical weight, much of it tied to the work of the CCC during the 1930s and 1940s. In 1970, a major landslide forced the closure of a central segment, permanently severing the highway into two distinct ends—north and south—each evolving in remarkably different ways.[17]

On the northern side, the road leads travelers directly into the heart of El Yunque, drawing nature lovers, hikers, and tourists into its lush canopies and mist-filled trails. This section pulses with the energy of exploration, commerce, and ecological wonder. In contrast, the southern stretch—cut off by geography and time—quietly evolved into a far more secluded enclave. Here, a tight-knit rural community emerged, marked by creativity, rustic beauty, and an almost bohemian spirit. It is a place where art and wilderness coexist, and where privacy itself became part of the landscape's identity.

Northern Section

The highway begins at PR-955 in the community of Palmer in the municipality of Río Grande. From there, it climbs into El Yunque National Forest approximately four kilometers from its beginning. Inside the forest, the road becomes concurrent with Forest Highway 191, and many of the forest's major attractions lie along its route.[18] At approximately 7.8 km is Las Cabezas Observation Point, and at 8.1 km is La Coca Falls, where an access gate prevents traffic beyond that point from 6:00 PM to 7:30 AM. The route continues past Yokahú Tower, Baño Grande, Baño de Oro, and the Palo Colorado area.[19] The road is closed to public traffic through part of the forest beginning approximately 13.1 km from Palmer, near the Mount Britton and El Yunque Peak trailheads.

Southern Section

(PR-191 continues—or once continued before the collapse—south out of El Yunque National Forest, passing the village of Florida and ending again at PR-31 near Río Blanco in the municipality of Naguabo.)

The southern section of PR-191 is geographically and historically tied to the town of Naguabo.[20] In 1828, Naguabo's population included approximately 378 enslaved people among roughly 3,078 total inhabitants. The remainder

consisted largely of small proprietors and jíbaros—rural subsistence farmers living in bohíos constructed from palm and local materials.[21]

Agriculture dominated the region: sugarcane, coffee, bananas, plantains, and root vegetables were cultivated throughout barrios such as Río and Río Blanco. These barrios, located along the foothills of the rainforest, occupied terrain far easier to cultivate than the steep elevations and rugged slopes of Barrio Cubuy.[22]

Parts of the mountainous landscape supported modest livestock farming—cattle, pigs, and poultry—alongside subsistence crops typical of rural jíbaro communities. Fisheries also supported coastal barrios such as Húcares, connecting mountain and sea through local trade and food systems.[23]

By 1899, U.S. census records documented Naguabo with a population of approximately 10,873 inhabitants, reflecting significant growth throughout the 19th century under both Spanish and American administrations.[24]

A full-scale sugar central, Central La Sierra, began operations in 1894, followed by additional centrals opening in 1901 and 1917. Owners such as Faustino Rodríguez and Carmen Fuertes developed prominent residences including Villa del Mar in Húcares in 1917. Húcares today is often described as a coastal community blending the atmosphere of a traditional fishing village with the beauty of Caribbean seaside life, gazing over calm turquoise waters along Puerto Rico's eastern shoreline.[25]

The original route of PR-191 likely followed rural tracks, dirt roads, and early paved paths connecting Naguabo Pueblo to the Río Blanco region, routes primarily used for transporting agricultural products and linking inland communities with the coast. Early roads often followed rivers such as Río Blanco and the valleys surrounding plantations and settlements.[26]

A key structure connecting PR-31 and PR-191 is the Río Blanco Bridge, constructed in 1928 by the Virginia Bridge & Iron Company.[27] This historic iron bridge linked PR-31 directly to the beginning of PR-191 as it climbed toward El Yunque National Forest and Barrio Cubuy, where the terrain became dramatically steeper, wetter, and more difficult for farmers, cattle ranchers, loggers, and miners to inhabit. Yet even before the official 1953 designation of PR-191, the corridor already possessed a network of roads, bridges, and rural infrastructure.

Puerto Rico Highway 191 was officially established in 1953 as part of the island's major highway renumbering reform carried out by Puerto Rico's Department of Transportation and Public Works (DTOP).[28] PR-191 formalized and improved a

corridor rooted in far older colonial and rural pathways, connecting Naguabo Pueblo, Río Blanco, and the forests beyond.

The communities of Daguao, Húcares, Maizales, Peña Pobre, Río, among others—and possibly Barrio Cubuy, to be further confirmed—all crossed by PR-191, were formally recognized as early as 1878.[29]

Although PR-191 was officially designated as a numbered highway in 1953, its route—and supporting structures such as the Río Blanco Bridge—date back to the late 1920s. (Update: As of 2025, the bridge still stands in its original location, though it is reportedly no longer in use — confirm.) The region rising from the bridge into the mountains is a realm of formidable beauty: dense rainforest slopes veiled in mist, threaded with rivers and adorned with cascading waterfalls. Here, PR-191 and Barrio Cubuy seem to merge into a symbiotic relationship with the forest itself, where road, mountain, river, and memory become almost impossible to separate.

Some notes to review:

- PR-191 continues — or continued before the collapse? — south out of El Yunque National Forest, passing the village of Florida and ending again at PR-31 near Río Blanco in the municipality of Naguabo. VERIFY CURRENT ROAD STATUS AND HISTORICAL CONTINUITY.)

-UPDATE / VERIFY: As of 2025, the Río Blanco Bridge still stands in its original location, though reportedly no longer in active use. Confirm current structural and historical status.)

Footnotes

1. Historical accounts of the Daguao cacicazgo and Taíno settlements in southeastern Puerto Rico.
2. Studies on Taíno linguistic survivals in Puerto Rican place names and geography.
3. Historical interpretations concerning the etymology of the name Naguabo.
4. Ricardo Alegría, *Ball Courts and Ceremonial Plazas in the West Indies*; Taíno petroglyph studies in eastern Puerto Rico.
5. Fernando Picó, *Historia General de Puerto Rico*; Francisco Moscoso on colonization and indigenous decline.
6. Historical economic records concerning mining and agriculture in eastern Puerto Rico during the Spanish colonial era.

7. Geographic and environmental studies concerning settlement patterns in the Luquillo Mountains and Barrio Cubuy.
8. British consular trade records and 19th-century Puerto Rican port documentation.
9. U.S. Forest Service historical archives on the Civilian Conservation Corps in El Yunque National Forest.
10. Historical trail and infrastructure studies related to early access into Cubuy and Río Blanco.
11. U.S. Forest Service Río Sabana Trail historical and restoration documentation.
12. El Toro Wilderness and Tradewinds Trail descriptions, U.S. Forest Service publications.
13. El Yunque National Forest trail guides and ecological descriptions of La Coca Trail.
14. U.S. Forest Service notices regarding La Mina Trail and post-Hurricane Maria recovery efforts.
15. Big Tree Trail interpretive material and post-2017 hurricane assessments.
16. Puerto Rico highway system history and pre-1953 transportation records.
17. Historical engineering and landslide records concerning PR-191 and the 1970 collapse.
18. Puerto Rico highway maps and U.S. Forest Service visitor information for El Yunque National Forest.
19. U.S. Forest Service records regarding Yokahú Tower, Baño Grande, Baño de Oro, and recreational infrastructure.
20. Municipal historical records of Naguabo.
21. 1828 demographic and agricultural records of Naguabo during the Spanish colonial period.
22. Agricultural and geographic studies of Río Blanco, Río barrio, and Barrio Cubuy.
23. Studies on jíbaro culture, rural subsistence farming, and fishing communities in eastern Puerto Rico.
24. 1899 U.S. census records for Puerto Rico.
25. Historical records concerning Central La Sierra, Villa del Mar, and the Húcares coastal region.
26. Historical transportation and agricultural corridor studies in eastern Puerto Rico.
27. Engineering and historical records regarding the Río Blanco Bridge and the Virginia Bridge & Iron Company.
28. Puerto Rico Department of Transportation and Public Works (DTOP) highway renumbering records, 1953.
29. Historical municipal and barrio recognition records in eastern Puerto Rico.

An Introduction and Histories of Barrio Cubuy

In the mist-veiled heights of the Sierra de Luquillo, Barrio Cubuy awaits like a hidden poem written by nature itself. Perched roughly 1,900 feet above sea level, this remote enclave seems to breathe in rhythm with the rainforest—each leaf, each murmuring river a stanza in its living verse. Suspended between mountain and cloud, Cubuy exists in a realm where water, stone, memory, and forest continuously speak to one another.[1]

Cubuy's name—often interpreted as "wherever you step, there is water"—echoes through every stone and trail, as the Cubuy River and its tributaries weave veins of liquid life through moss-covered boulders, giant ferns, and dense tropical undergrowth. At the confluence where the Cubuy, Icacos, and Prieto rivers meet, cascades tumble in crystalline symphony—the so-called Icacos Falls becoming a sacred meeting of waters in motion.[2]

Here, the forest canopy forms a cathedral of green. Breadfruit trees, towering yagrumos, orchids, heliconias, and ancient tree ferns cradle the fog; trails open onto granite slabs polished smooth by centuries of flowing water, inviting travelers to pause, listen, and let the jungle speak. Within this living hush, coquí frogs sing at dusk while small tree frogs help maintain a surprisingly mosquito-free canopy—a delicate ecological balance that feels almost miraculous in such a humid and fertile world.[3]

The human presence here remains gentle. Hidden among the mountains are modest lodges, rustic homes, and private sanctuaries that seem less constructed than quietly placed in reverence to the land itself. Residents and visitors often rise before dawn to the sound of rivers and coquí songs, then wander trails that disappear into solitude and birdsong—where guides share stories of Taíno petroglyphs carved into riverside stones and where oral histories move as fluidly as the rivers themselves.[4]

Cubuy is rural in spirit, small in population, yet immense in character—a place shaped equally by forest and river, isolation and community. It is a landscape where rain-kissed stones hold ancestral memory, where mist drifts like breath through the mountains, and where every step—every breath—can feel like poetry in motion.

Historical Origin

Barrio Cubuy is located in the municipality of Naguabo, Puerto Rico, along the southern slopes of El Yunque National Forest. It is among the most remote and

mountainous barrios of Naguabo, situated within the southern foothills of the Luquillo Mountain range and characterized by steep terrain, dense tropical forest, and an intricate network of rivers and streams, including the Río Cubuy, which feeds into the Río Blanco watershed.[5]

The region forms a natural transition between Naguabo's coastal plain and the rainforest interior, functioning historically as both refuge and threshold. Long before Spanish colonization, the wider Naguabo region was deeply rooted in Taíno settlement, particularly within the Daguao cacicazgo, one of the principal indigenous chiefdoms of eastern Puerto Rico. Archaeological evidence—including petroglyphs near Río Blanco and Icacos—suggests continuous indigenous presence in the area centuries before European arrival.[6]

Some historical interpretations suggest that the name "Cubuy" means "wherever you step, there is water," a fitting description for a landscape shaped by rivers, rainfall, waterfalls, springs, and constant humidity. Oral traditions further suggest that Cubuy once extended across what are now the municipalities of Naguabo and Canóvanas. Over time, shifting municipal boundaries and the gradual weakening of direct connections divided Cubuy into two distinct sectors—one in Naguabo and another in Canóvanas. Yet despite this division, the two regions remained linked through forest paths and mountain trails. Most notably, the Río Sabana Trail connects with the Tradewinds Trail deep within the highlands of El Yunque, continuing toward Cubuy in Canóvanas.[7]

The exact origin of the name Cubuy remains uncertain, though it is widely believed to derive from Taíno linguistic roots. One of the earliest documented mentions of the area appears in the 1878 demographic study *Isla de Puerto Rico: Estudio Histórico, Geográfico y Estadístico* by Manuel Úbeda y Delgado, who referred to the region as "Cubui." At the time, the area formed part of Río Blanco barrio and was recognized for fertile agricultural lands and for small-scale mining activity associated with late nineteenth-century gold extraction in the region.[8]

Cubuy lies within the established boundaries of Río Blanco barrio, already recognized as such by the late 19th century. The area is notable not only for its lush, fertile landscape—once a thriving center of agriculture—but also for its historical significance. Among its most remarkable features is a gold mine dating back to the late 1800s, a remnant of the region's brief but notable mining activity.

Today, Cubuy stands as a quiet yet powerful reminder of Puerto Rico's layered history, from its indigenous roots to its colonial past. DESTINO 191)

The barrios surrounding Cubuy include Río Blanco to the west, Río to the southwest, Florida to the south and southeast, and Daguao farther southward. Together, these barrios form part of the mountainous and river-fed interior of southeastern Puerto Rico, where rainforest ecology and rural life have remained deeply interconnected for centuries.

The landscapes of Cubuy offer expansive views toward the Caribbean Sea and historically served as strategic vantage points during the Spanish colonial period, when routes through Río Blanco connected the mountains to coastal settlements.[9] Cubuy also forms part of the headwaters of the Río Blanco watershed, whose rivers later became important for hydroelectric development and water management in eastern Puerto Rico. Along the Cubuy River lies a notable Taíno petroglyph depicting three anthropomorphic figures—believed by some researchers to represent a hunter, a fisherman, and an unidentified ceremonial figure.[10]

The community of Cubuy is geographically defined as beginning near the bridge at Camino La Planta and extending upward toward one of the southern entrances to El Yunque National Forest. This entrance provides access to the Río Sabana Recreational Area, co-managed since 2021 by members of the Cubuy community and the U.S. Forest Service as part of local ecotourism and conservation initiatives.[11]

The rivers and watersheds of Cubuy sustain exceptionally fertile land rich in biodiversity and natural resources. Among the area's best-known attractions is Charco El Hippie, a scenic natural swimming area along the Río Blanco that attracts visitors from Puerto Rico and abroad. There, a towering rock formation rises above emerald waters, framed by rainforest vegetation and the constant sound of rushing river currents.[12]

Early Development

The modern town of Naguabo was officially founded in 1794 in what is now known as Pueblo Viejo. In 1821, residents petitioned for permission to relocate the settlement to a more favorable location, where the town remains today. A parish dedicated to Nuestra Señora del Rosario was established in 1798, and the church itself was constructed between 1841 and 1856.[13]

By 1878, the official barrios of Naguabo included Pueblo, Maizales, Duque, Mariana, Quebrada Palma, Daguao, Santiago y Lima, Húcares, Río, Peña Pobre, and Río Blanco. Although Cubuy was not yet separately listed, it likely fell within Río Blanco or Duque due to its mountainous location near El Yunque.

Agriculture dominated the region during the nineteenth century. By 1828, Naguabo produced approximately 1,400 quintales of sugar through twenty-one trapiches, while coffee cultivation and rum distillation also flourished. Sugar production continued throughout the century, with haciendas such as Quebrada Palma operating until their destruction during 1899 San Ciriaco Hurricane.[14] Mineral exploitation—including gold and silver mining—also persisted into the late nineteenth century, especially in Río Blanco and the surrounding Luquillo Mountains.

The region faced profound social and economic challenges. Around 1855, a devastating cholera morbo epidemic drastically impacted the population. In 1828, Naguabo's estimated population stood at roughly 3,078 inhabitants, including approximately 378 enslaved individuals. Records from the nineteenth century document slave sales, marriages, manumissions, and labor systems tied to the plantation economy.[15]

The Real Cédula de Gracias of 1815 encouraged European immigration into Puerto Rico, reshaping local demographics and economic structures. Around 1822–1823, an attempted uprising in the Daguao sector—partially inspired by independence movements elsewhere in Latin America—promoted the idea of a "República Boricua." The revolt, led primarily by enslaved individuals, was ultimately suppressed by colonial authorities.[16]

Puerto Rico became a territory of the United States following the Spanish–American War in 1898. That same year, U.S. forces occupied Naguabo on September 28, and the first U.S. census of 1899 recorded a population of 10,873 inhabitants.[17]

Between 1700 and 1900, the region surrounding Cubuy experienced agricultural expansion, modest mining operations, epidemics, changing labor systems, and shifts from Spanish colonial rule to U.S. territorial administration. Though Cubuy itself remained isolated and sparsely populated, it was quietly shaped by these larger transformations unfolding throughout Río Blanco, Naguabo, and the greater El Yunque region.

Footnotes

1. Geographic and ecological studies of the Sierra de Luquillo and El Yunque National Forest; elevation records for Barrio Cubuy.
2. Oral histories and regional ecological descriptions compiled in *Destino 191*; hydrological studies of the Cubuy, Icacos, and Prieto river systems.

3. U.S. Forest Service ecological studies on El Yunque biodiversity and rainforest ecosystems.
4. Oral histories from Cubuy residents and local ecotourism narratives associated with Río Sabana and Río Blanco.
5. Puerto Rico Planning Board geographic records and U.S. Geological Survey topographic data for Naguabo and Barrio Cubuy.
6. Puerto Rico Institute of Culture archaeological documentation regarding Taíno petroglyphs and the Daguao cacicazgo.
7. Vázquez & Piña-Martínez, *Destino 191* (2023).
8. Manuel Úbeda y Delgado, *Isla de Puerto Rico: Estudio Histórico, Geográfico y Estadístico* (1878).
9. Suárez, historical research on military and transportation routes in Río Blanco and southeastern Puerto Rico (2023).
10. Rivera, archaeological findings regarding Taíno petroglyphs in Río Blanco and Cubuy (2015).
11. *El Oriental* newspaper coverage of Río Sabana Recreational Area co-management initiative (2021).
12. Ecotourism and environmental references documented in *Destino 191* and local Naguabo tourism materials.
13. Municipal historical records of Naguabo and church archives of Nuestra Señora del Rosario parish.
14. Agricultural production statistics and historical hurricane records concerning Hacienda Quebrada Palma and Hurricane San Ciriaco (1899).
15. Nineteenth-century census and slavery records from Naguabo municipal archives.
16. Historical studies regarding the Real Cédula de Gracias of 1815 and anti-colonial uprisings in eastern Puerto Rico.
17. U.S. War Department occupation records and 1899 U.S. Census data for Puerto Rico.

A Timeline of Histories, Anecdotes, and Oral Narratives of Barrio Cubuy

With Parallel Stories of Art, Culture, and Memory Across Puerto Rico

Over the years, a remarkably diverse and often unexpected group of individuals has found their way to Cubuy. Some arrived searching for land, solitude, or refuge; others came drawn by the mystery of the rainforest itself—its silence, its rivers, its sense of timelessness. What they discovered was more than a place. Cubuy became, for many, a state of mind: a living landscape where nature, memory, art, and community intertwine.

(Add here the names of many from Cubuy that we are not yet fully familiar with, including longtime residents, jíbaro families, caretakers, farmers, storytellers, and landowners whose presence quietly shaped the spirit and continuity of the community.)

Among those connected to Cubuy are Joe Martinson, heir to the Martinson coffee legacy and a prominent landowner in the area, along with his partner, gold medalist _____. Fred Mueller, co-founder of Pace Gallery in New York, also owned property in Cubuy. Marianne LaForce and her son Matthew Kavanaugh are the current owners of Casa Cubuy Eco Lodge. The artist Siddhia Hutchinson and her husband, architect Stanley Hutchinson, are longtime residents, as are Puerto Rican artist Carlos Betancourt and architect Alberto Latorre, who hold a lifetime easement in the area.

Other residents and landowners include tour guide Robin Phillips; Noelia (last name to be confirmed) of Noelia Restaurant; Zoilo Méndez; Shirley Mooney of Casa Flamboyant; architect George Warner of Miami; Lorna and Rey (last names to be confirmed); Kevin and Jackeline Price of Arkansas and Chicago; and more recently David Orr of _____, who has also become part of Cubuy's evolving story. Each, in different ways, has contributed to the layered human tapestry of the mountain community.

Cubuy has likewise welcomed an extraordinary constellation of visitors over the decades—among them Puerto Rico's former governor Luis Muñoz Marín; photographer and artist Robert Mapplethorpe; painters Peter Doig and Anselm Kiefer (to confirm); film director Federico Fellini and members of his crew during the filming of Fellini Satyricon; composer and producer Cucco Peña; collectors César and Mimi Reyes; Chilo and Milly Andreu; and art dealer Walter Otero. Some stayed briefly, others returned often, but all became part of Cubuy's oral and cultural mythology.

The rainforest and Barrio Cubuy have inspired many of these residents and visitors, giving rise to artworks, conversations, friendships, films, performances, gardens, lodges, and stories that continue to shape the region's artistic and cultural legacy. Tales such as the presence of a notable painting by Leonora Carrington—at one point held by Matthew Kavanaugh—(to expand) further deepen Cubuy's atmosphere of mystery and creative resonance.

(Note: some individuals may prefer not to be publicly named, and all references should be respectfully confirmed as this manuscript evolves.)

With this project, we seek not only to add to—but to gently gather, organize, and honor—the already rich and layered history of Barrio Cubuy. This is not a definitive history, but a living archive in progress: a tapestry woven from memory, oral narratives, personal anecdotes, historical fragments, photographs, artworks,

maps, rumors, family stories, and lived experience. It unfolds through the voices and gestures of many people across generations.

At its heart, this work is an act of remembrance and preservation. It aims to illuminate not only the importance of recording the stories of those who came before us, but also the quiet power these stories continue to hold for the present and future of a community nestled within the mystical embrace of one of the oldest and most legendary rainforests in the Americas.

This forest—epic in scale, sacred in spirit, and ancient beyond memory—shapes far more than geography. It shapes imagination, identity, emotion, and human connection. Its influence extends beyond the mountains themselves, touching even those who have never stood beneath its green cathedral of mist, rivers, and towering trees.

What follows are fragments of memory: timelines, anecdotes, oral histories, artistic encounters, local legends, historical events, and personal recollections that together begin to weave the larger tapestry of Cubuy and its surrounding world. Some stories shimmer with mystery; others carry humor, sorrow, beauty, or wonder. Some may even contradict one another—as oral histories often do. Yet together they reveal something deeper than simple chronology: the living soul of a place.

And perhaps, for those willing to listen closely, these stories may also offer something increasingly rare in the modern world—a sense of connection, enchantment, and an unexpected peace.

Timeline: From Taíno Memory to Colonial Transformation

Before 1511 — La Piedra del Indio / La Piedra de Salomé

Known locally as La Piedra del Indio, and also remembered as La Piedra de Salomé after Salomé Figueroa, a local farmer who once sold fruit from its broad, flat surface, this stone has long occupied a place of meaning in the Cubuy community. Before the construction of Highway 191, it served as an important landmark in the area—a point of gathering, orientation, memory, and perhaps ceremony.[1]

According to oral tradition, the Taíno may have used the stone for sacrifices, offerings, or ritual purposes. Others believe it may have functioned as a lookout point, allowing inhabitants to observe the entrance to Río Blanco and the surrounding high terrain, whether to watch for enemies such as the Caribs or, later, during the period of Spanish colonization.[2] While Taíno presence throughout the region is evident, this particular site appears to have been more extensively developed and used during the Spanish period. Its elevated position gives it a natural authority: from the rock, one can imagine eyes scanning the valleys, rivers, and mountain passages below, reading the landscape as both map and warning system.[3]

1511 and Earlier — The Taíno Daguao Cacicazgo

Before 1511, the region surrounding what is now PR-191 and Barrio Cubuy formed part of the world of the Taíno people, specifically the Daguao cacicazgo, a pre-Columbian chiefdom in southeastern Puerto Rico led by a cacique named Daguao. His name survives in the geography of the region, preserving an indigenous memory embedded in the land itself.[4]

The Daguao cacicazgo represents an essential part of Puerto Rico's indigenous heritage, especially in the area around Naguabo. Many place names across the island—Cubuy, Humacao, Yabucoa, Daguao—are Taíno in origin, carrying within them a linguistic and cultural bridge to the island's pre-Columbian past. The story of Daguao connects ancient indigenous geography to modern identity, particularly in southeastern Puerto Rico, where rivers, barrios, mountains, and roads still echo with Taíno memory.[5]

The Taíno practiced agriculture, cultivating yucca, corn, and other crops suited to the island's tropical climate. They lived in communities known as *yukayekes*, led by *caciques*, and understood the natural world as alive with spirit. Rivers, stones, trees, mountains, storms, and caves were not inert matter, but presences. In El Yunque and the areas surrounding Barrio Cubuy, the Taíno left behind petroglyphs carved into stone—marks of culture, spirituality, and mystery that continue to speak across time.[6]

For centuries, life in the El Yunque region changed slowly. The forest remained sacred, protective, and abundant. But in 1493, with the arrival of the Spanish, the beginning of the end of Taíno culture as a distinct civilization was set in motion. Disease, violent conflict, enslavement, and forced labor would rapidly transform the island and devastate its first people.[7]

1511 — The Spanish–Taíno War of San Juan–Borikén

(add image)

In 1511, the Spanish–Taíno War of San Juan–Borikén, also known as the Taíno Rebellion of 1511, became the first major conflict in Borikén after the arrival of the Spaniards in 1493. The rebellion marked a profound turning point: the moment when Taíno resistance moved from local opposition to organized war against colonial domination.[8]

1512 — Spanish Incursions into Taíno Territory

In 1512, Spanish commanders Juan Cerón and Miguel Díaz led horseback incursions into the territories of Taíno caciques, destroying *yukayekes* and capturing Indigenous people for forced labor and slavery. These campaigns were driven by both military and economic motives: control of land, access to gold and other resources, and the expansion of colonial authority.[9]

1513 — Taíno Counteroffensive from Daguao

In 1513, the Taíno launched a counteroffensive from Daguao, in the eastern region of the island. From this base, they managed to burn the Spanish capital of Caparra, demonstrating the strength and reach of Indigenous resistance. During the same year, Spanish forces carried out repeated incursions into Taíno territories, including attacks ordered by Viceroy Diego Colón after the destruction of Caparra.[10]

The conflict spread across several regions. Spanish forces entered the domains of Hayuya, Orocobix, Orocovis, and Otoao, while Taíno communities continued to resist from the mountains, rivers, and forested interiors. The landscape itself became part of the struggle—both refuge and battlefield.[11]

1513 — Santiago de Daguao

Also in 1513, Spanish Viceroy Diego Colón founded Santiago de Daguao at the mouth of the Río Daguao as a military outpost intended to defend against Indigenous attacks. Yet the settlement was short-lived. Just a year later, King

Ferdinand the Catholic ordered its abandonment, and it was soon destroyed by coordinated Taíno and Carib resistance.[12]

One historical account mentions the death of Cristóbal de Guzmán, a Spanish figure reportedly killed during an Indigenous attack nearby. The area was strategically important as the territory of the Taíno leader Daguao, sometimes referred to as Yukibo, who led resistance efforts in the region. The name Daguao is often interpreted as "land rich in water," a phrase that reflects both the natural abundance of the area and its symbolic identity. The former settlement stood near the Río Daguao, where today the river marks the boundary between Naguabo and Ceiba.[13]

1514–1529 — Resistance, Exile, and Disappearance from the Record

(add photo)

Between 1514 and 1529, Spanish forces continued advancing into Daguao and other Taíno territories. Many Taíno survivors sought refuge in the Lesser Antilles, where the presence of Agüeybaná II was reportedly noted in Guadeloupe. The last possible references to the high chief appear around 1518, after which he disappears from the historical record.[14]

Still, resistance did not end immediately. Attacks carried out by exiled Taíno and their allies from neighboring islands continued through the 1520s, finally diminishing around 1529. Though Spanish documents would later speak of disappearance, the Taíno story did not truly end. It survived in bloodlines, language, foodways, place names, oral traditions, and the stones of places like Cubuy.[15]

1650 — Early Gold Deposits in the Luquillo Mountains

By around 1650, Spanish explorers had identified placer gold deposits in the Luquillo Mountains, including areas near Naguabo such as Duque and Río Blanco. Production was small and short-lived, never reaching the scale of the great mining centers elsewhere in the Spanish empire. Yet the search for minerals contributed to the gradual colonial penetration of the mountain region.[16]

1700–1900 — Settlement, Agriculture, Mining, and Colonial Change

(add image)

Between 1700 and 1900, the area surrounding Barrio Cubuy experienced gradual settlement, agriculture-based growth, modest mineral operations, public health crises, and major shifts in governance—from Spanish colonial rule to U.S. territorial administration. Sugar and coffee shaped the lower and more accessible regions, while the higher elevations near Cubuy remained more remote, difficult to cultivate, and closely tied to forest life.[17]

Cubuy itself was indirectly shaped by these broader processes, especially through its relationship with Río Blanco and the El Yunque mountain region. The community remained somewhat apart: influenced by colonial agriculture and mining, yet still protected by steep terrain, heavy rainfall, dense vegetation, and the difficulty of access. In this way, Cubuy became both connected and separate—a place touched by history, but never entirely absorbed by it.

1828 — Population, Enslavement, and Rural Life in Naguabo

By 1828, the population of Naguabo was approximately 3,078 people, including around 378 enslaved individuals. Historical records document slave sales, marriages, and manumissions continuing through the early 1870s.[18] These records reveal the human complexity beneath the region's agricultural development: sugar, coffee, cattle, and land were all tied to systems of labor, hierarchy, survival, and resistance.

For the mountain communities that would later shape Cubuy, this period laid the foundations of rural life—small farms, difficult roads, isolated households, oral traditions, and a profound dependence on rivers, soil, and forest. The visible history may belong to ports, plantations, and official records, but the deeper history also lives in paths, stones, water crossings, and remembered names.

Footnotes

1. Vázquez & Piña-Martínez, *Destino 191* (2023); oral histories concerning La Piedra del Indio / La Piedra de Salomé.
2. Piña-Martínez, *Destino 191* (2023); Suárez (2023), oral and regional interpretations of the stone's possible ceremonial and strategic uses.
3. Local resident testimony cited in *Destino 191* regarding the rock's visibility over Río Blanco and surrounding terrain.
4. Historical accounts of the Daguao cacicazgo and Taíno settlement in southeastern Puerto Rico.
5. Studies on Taíno linguistic survivals in Puerto Rican place names and regional geography.
6. Ricardo Alegría, *Ball Courts and Ceremonial Plazas in the West Indies*; Irving Rouse, *The Taínos: Rise and Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus*.
7. Fernando Picó, *Historia General de Puerto Rico*; Francisco Moscoso, writings on colonization and Taíno demographic collapse.

8. Historical accounts of the Spanish–Taíno War of San Juan–Borikén / Taíno Rebellion of 1511.
9. Colonial records concerning Juan Cerón, Miguel Díaz, Spanish incursions, and the capture of Taíno people for forced labor.
10. Accounts of the 1513 Taíno counteroffensive from Daguao and the burning of Caparra.
11. Historical accounts of Spanish campaigns into Hayuya, Orocobix, Orocovis, and Otoao during the Taíno resistance.
12. Salvador Brau, *Historia de Puerto Rico*; Spanish colonial records concerning Santiago de Daguao.
13. Historical references to Cristóbal de Guzmán, Daguao/Yukibo, and the Río Daguao region between Naguabo and Ceiba.
14. Historical accounts concerning Agüeybaná II, Taíno exile in the Lesser Antilles, and post-1514 resistance.
15. Contemporary studies on Taíno survival, cultural continuity, and Indigenous identity in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean.
16. Historical mining records concerning placer gold deposits in the Luquillo Mountains, Duque, and Río Blanco.
17. Historical agricultural, mining, and governance records concerning Naguabo, Río Blanco, and the El Yunque mountain region between 1700 and 1900.
18. Nineteenth-century demographic and slavery records for Naguabo, including population estimates, slave sales, marriages, and manumissions.
19.

1833 — The Birth of Francisco Oller

In 1833, one of Puerto Rico's most important cultural figures was born: Francisco Oller, whose life and work would forever transform the history of Caribbean art. Born on June 17, 1833, in Bayamón, Francisco Manuel Oller y Cestero would become not only Puerto Rico's most internationally recognized nineteenth-century painter, but also the only Latin American artist directly associated with the development of French Impressionism.[1]

Oller emerged during a century of profound transformation in Puerto Rico—a colonial society shaped by plantation economies, slavery, European influence, and the gradual formation of a distinct Puerto Rican cultural identity. Though born into a prosperous and aristocratic family, Oller would dedicate much of his artistic life to portraying ordinary Puerto Rican landscapes, laborers, farmers, and local customs with remarkable dignity and humanity.[2]

As a child, Oller demonstrated exceptional artistic talent. At the age of eleven, he began studying under the painter Juan Cleto Noa in San Juan. His abilities were recognized early, and in 1848 Puerto Rico's governor, General Juan Prim, offered the young artist an opportunity to continue his studies in Rome. Oller's

mother, believing him too young to travel alone abroad, declined the offer. Yet the island could not contain his ambition for long.[3]

At eighteen, Oller moved to Madrid, where he studied at the Royal Academy of San Fernando under Federico de Madrazo, then director of the Prado Museum. Later, in Paris, he entered into direct contact with the artistic revolutions reshaping European painting. He studied under Thomas Couture, spent time working in the Louvre, and became associated with artists including Gustave Courbet, Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Alfred Sisley, and Frédéric Bazille.[4]

For a brief period, even Paul Cézanne studied under Oller, though their relationship later became strained. By the 1860s, Oller had become deeply involved in avant-garde artistic circles in Paris, while simultaneously maintaining strong intellectual and emotional ties to Puerto Rico and the Caribbean.[5]

Unlike many artists of his era who abandoned local subjects in favor of European tastes, Oller carried Puerto Rico into the center of modern painting. He painted tropical vegetation, jíbaros, markets, fruits, laborers, and local traditions not as exotic curiosities, but as worthy subjects of fine art and modernity. In works such as *El Velorio*, he created powerful social and cultural portraits of Puerto Rican life that blended realism, political commentary, and Caribbean atmosphere.[6]

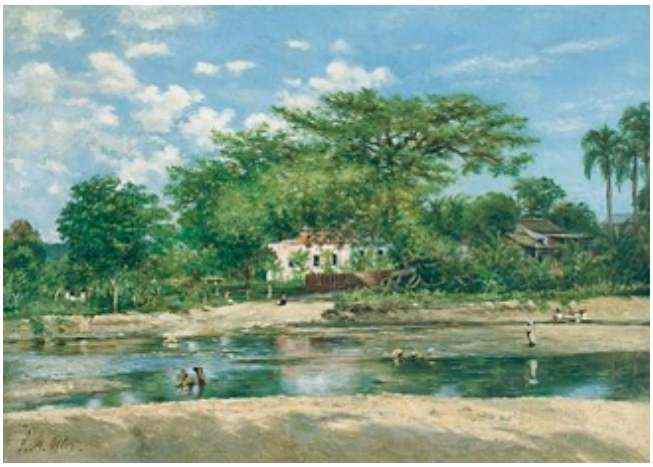
In 1868, Oller founded the Free Academy of Art of Puerto Rico, helping establish formal artistic education on the island and influencing generations of Puerto Rican painters. His role as a bridge between Europe and the Caribbean remains extraordinary: a transatlantic artist who absorbed the innovations of modern European art while remaining deeply rooted in Puerto Rican identity, landscape, and light.[7]

Though Oller's life unfolded far from the mountains of Cubuy, his legacy belongs to the broader story of Puerto Rico's cultural awakening—a reminder that the island's forests, people, labor, rituals, and tropical realities were not peripheral to modern art, but part of its very evolution. In many ways, Oller helped paint Puerto Rico into global art history.[8]

Footnotes

1. Arturo Dávila, *Francisco Oller: A Realist-Impressionist*; Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico archives on Francisco Oller.
2. Edward J. Sullivan, *From San Juan to Paris and Back: Francisco Oller and Caribbean Art in the Era of Impressionism*.
3. Biographical records from the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña and historical studies on Francisco Oller's early education.

4. Historical records concerning Oller's studies in Madrid and Paris; Musée d'Orsay and Prado Museum references on nineteenth-century artistic circles.
5. Scholarly accounts regarding Francisco Oller's relationship with Paul Cézanne and the Paris avant-garde.
6. Analysis of *El Velorio* and Oller's representations of Puerto Rican society in Caribbean art history studies.
7. Historical documentation concerning the founding of the Free Academy of Art of Puerto Rico in 1868.
8. Edward J. Sullivan and Caribbean art historical scholarship on Francisco Oller's role in Impressionism and Puerto Rican cultural identity.



1841–1856 — The Church of Nuestra Señora del Rosario

(add image)

Though the parish of Nuestra Señora del Rosario in Naguabo had been formally established in 1798, construction of its church unfolded gradually between 1841 and 1856. Rising above the growing town, the church became not only a religious center, but also a civic and emotional anchor for the region.[1]

Like many churches built throughout nineteenth-century Puerto Rico, it served multiple roles at once: sanctuary, meeting place, registry of births and deaths, refuge during storms, and witness to the transformations of colonial life. Within its walls passed generations of jíbaros, merchants, enslaved individuals, landowners, soldiers, children, mourners, and newly married couples. The church bells echoed across the valleys and foothills leading toward Río Blanco and the mountainous interior that would eventually connect to Cubuy.[2]

Constructed during a century marked by agricultural expansion, epidemics, slavery, and political transition, the church stood as a silent observer to the changing realities of southeastern Puerto Rico. Even today, it remains among the enduring architectural and historical symbols of Naguabo's nineteenth-century identity.[3]

1855 — The Cholera Morbo Epidemic and Its Impact on Naguabo

(add image)

In 1855, one of the deadliest public health crises in Puerto Rican history entered the island through the port town of Naguabo. Cholera Morbo arrived on November 10 of that year, most likely carried through infected livestock and maritime trade routes connected to the nearby island of Saint Thomas.[4]

From the humid docks and coastal edges of Naguabo, the disease spread rapidly across Puerto Rico. By early 1856, cholera had reached the northern, southern, and western regions of the island, leaving devastation in its path. The epidemic lasted until December of that year and claimed an estimated 25,820 lives—making it one of the most catastrophic epidemics ever recorded in Puerto Rico.[5]

The burden fell disproportionately upon Afro-descendant populations and the poor. Historical estimates indicate that approximately 5,469 enslaved individuals died, along with nearly 15,610 free people of color and approximately 5,741 whites.[6] In Naguabo and its surrounding barrios—including Río Blanco and the mountainous sectors connected to Cubuy—the epidemic struck early and violently. Parish records and census data suggest hundreds of cases in the region within months of the outbreak's arrival.[7]

Fear spread almost as quickly as the disease itself. Across Puerto Rico, authorities established emergency sanitary measures in an attempt to contain the epidemic. *Cordones sanitarios* restricted movement between towns and barrios, while guards monitored roads and ports. Entry into affected areas required official authorization, and local commissioners issued daily health reports.[8]

Temporary cholera hospitals and field clinics were erected, while mass graves—often covered in lime to slow contagion—appeared near towns and settlements. In western Puerto Rico, figures such as Ramón Emeterio Betances coordinated aggressive containment efforts in places like Mayagüez, organizing temporary hospitals, sanitation campaigns, and emergency burial grounds. Similar strategies were implemented throughout high-risk municipalities, including Naguabo.[9]

Beyond the immediate tragedy, the epidemic profoundly altered the island's economy and social fabric. In Naguabo, where agriculture, trade, and modest mining activity had fueled local development, the epidemic disrupted labor systems and destabilized already fragile communities. The death toll among working-class and enslaved populations caused severe demographic shifts and slowed regional growth for years afterward.[10]

For mountain communities connected to Cubuy and Río Blanco, the epidemic became part of oral memory: a reminder of how quickly life could change in an island world dependent on ports, trade, rivers, and movement between distant shores. Even in the dense embrace of El Yunque's mountains, disease arrived like an invisible storm.

Today, the 1855 cholera epidemic remains a defining moment in the history of Naguabo and Puerto Rico—a tragedy that exposed the vulnerabilities of colonial society while also marking the emergence of some of the island's earliest organized public health responses.[11]

1875 — The Birth of Ramón Frade

In 1875, another important figure in Puerto Rican cultural history was born: Ramón Frade, one of the island's most beloved painters of rural life and jíbaro identity. Born on February 8, 1875, in Cayey, Ramón Frade de León would later become known for portraying Puerto Rico's countryside and peasant culture with striking realism, dignity, and emotional depth.[12]

Known affectionately as *Don Monche Frade*, he received a classical academic education and developed a realist style that captured the textures, expressions, and atmosphere of Puerto Rican rural life during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[13]

Though Frade was also trained as an architect and photographer, it was painting that secured his place in Puerto Rican cultural memory. His most iconic

work, *El Pan Nuestro*, became one of the defining visual representations of the Puerto Rican jíbaro: solemn, humble, resilient, and deeply tied to the land.[14]

Frade painted Puerto Rico not through the lens of exoticism, but through familiarity and intimacy. His works documented mountain roads, peasant homes, laborers, livestock, tropical vegetation, and the emotional realities of rural existence. In many ways, the world he painted shared spiritual kinship with places like Cubuy—regions where isolation, agriculture, rainforest, and tradition shaped both daily life and identity.[15]

His paintings remain important not only as artistic achievements, but also as visual documents of a Puerto Rico undergoing transition: from Spanish colony to American territory, from agrarian society to modern nation. Through Frade's eyes, the jíbaro became more than a rural figure—he became a cultural symbol of Puerto Rican endurance, memory, and belonging.[16]

Ramón Frade died in Cayey on November 7, 1954, yet his imagery continues to live within the collective imagination of Puerto Rico, where mountains, labor, rain, and rural dignity remain inseparable from the island's cultural soul.[17]

La Planchadora,1948 Our Daily Bread, 1905.

Smarthistory.org:

Ramón Frade, *Our Daily Bread*, 1905, oil on canvas (Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, San Juan)

Ramón Frade created an icon with his 1905 painting *Our Daily Bread*. The figure of an older man dominates the composition. He is frontal and monumental. Set in the center foreground, we look up at him as he rises high above the

mountainous landscape in the background. The weathered lines of his face are rendered in great detail, as are the prominent veins of his hands and feet that speak of age and a life of labor in the mountains and valleys of Puerto Rico.

The painting and its origin

The scene is set in the countryside of Puerto Rico, in a geography reminiscent of the area of Cayey, where the artist lived most of his adult life. The *jíbaro* walks barefoot on a dirt path, dressed in tan pants and a thin, white shirt with a small rip below the right shoulder. He cradles in his arms a bunch of mafafo bananas (a type of plantain), fruits that have long been a staple of the Puerto Rican diet. The machete he used to cut down the bundle hangs from his waist from a rope and a straw hat covers his graying hair. The man's gaze is directed toward the viewer; he is tired but dignified as the sun lights half of his face.

Footnotes

1. Historical and ecclesiastical records concerning the founding of Nuestra Señora del Rosario parish in Naguabo.
2. Municipal and church archives documenting nineteenth-century civic and religious life in Naguabo.
3. Puerto Rico Office of Historic Preservation and regional architectural studies of colonial-era churches.
4. Historical studies of the 1855 cholera outbreak in Puerto Rico and maritime trade routes with Saint Thomas.
5. Puerto Rican public health records and nineteenth-century demographic studies concerning the Cholera Morbo epidemic.
6. Historical mortality estimates related to the 1855 cholera epidemic and racial demographics in Puerto Rico.
7. Parish death registries and census records from Naguabo during the cholera outbreak period.
8. Colonial government records concerning sanitary cordons and emergency epidemic measures in Puerto Rico.
9. Historical accounts of Ramón Emeterio Betances and cholera containment efforts in Mayagüez and other municipalities.
10. Economic and demographic studies concerning the social effects of the cholera epidemic on agricultural regions of Puerto Rico.
11. Puerto Rican medical history studies regarding nineteenth-century epidemics and early public health responses.
12. Biographical records concerning Ramón Frade de León; Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña archives.
13. Art historical studies on Ramón Frade's realist style and academic formation.
14. Analyses of *El Pan Nuestro* and representations of jíbaro identity in Puerto Rican art.
15. Studies concerning rural imagery, landscape, and nationalism in Puerto Rican painting.
16. Puerto Rican cultural history scholarship regarding Ramón Frade and the symbolism of the jíbaro.
17. Museum and archival records documenting the life and death of Ramón Frade de León.

1898 — The Birth of Luis Muñoz Marín

Luis Muñoz Marín was born on February 18, 1898, in San Juan, during one of the most transformative years in Puerto Rican history—the same year that Spain ceded Puerto Rico to the United States following the Spanish–American War.[1]

The son of journalist, writer, and statesman Luis Muñoz Rivera and Amalia Marín Castilla, Muñoz Marín grew up surrounded by politics, literature, and debates about Puerto Rico's future. His father was one of the island's most influential political leaders during the final years of Spanish colonial rule and the early American period.[2]

Educated in both Puerto Rico and the United States, Muñoz Marín spent part of his youth in Washington, D.C., where his father served as Puerto Rico's Resident Commissioner. He later studied journalism and liberal arts at Georgetown University, though he did not complete a formal degree.[3]

By the 1930s and 1940s, Muñoz Marín had become the central political figure of modern Puerto Rico. In 1938, he founded the Partido Popular Democrático (Popular Democratic Party, or PPD), advocating social reform, economic modernization, labor rights, and greater political autonomy for the island.[4]

In 1948, he became the first democratically elected governor of Puerto Rico, serving from 1949 to 1965. During his administration, Puerto Rico underwent sweeping transformation through programs such as *Operación Manos a la Obra* ("Operation Bootstrap"), which shifted the island from a largely agricultural economy toward industrialization and manufacturing.[5]

Muñoz Marín also played a major role in the creation of the Estado Libre Asociado (Commonwealth of Puerto Rico) in 1952, a political status that redefined the island's relationship with the United States while preserving a distinct Puerto Rican identity.[6]

Though admired by many as a visionary modernizer and champion of Puerto Rican culture, his legacy remains complex and debated. Critics have pointed to economic dependency, migration pressures, and political contradictions that emerged during and after his administration. Nevertheless, few figures shaped twentieth-century Puerto Rico more profoundly than Luis Muñoz Marín.[7]

He died on April 30, 1980, in San Juan, leaving behind a political and cultural legacy that continues to influence Puerto Rican society today.[8]

Footnotes

1. Biographical records and historical archives concerning the birth of Luis Muñoz Marín in San Juan, Puerto Rico, in 1898.
2. Historical studies on Luis Muñoz Rivera and Puerto Rican political history during the late Spanish colonial and early American periods.
3. Biographical accounts of Luis Muñoz Marín's education and early years in Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C.
4. Historical records regarding the founding of the Partido Popular Democrático (PPD) in 1938.
5. Studies concerning Operation Bootstrap and Puerto Rico's industrialization during the mid-twentieth century.
6. Historical and political analyses of the establishment of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico in 1952.
7. Scholarly evaluations and debates concerning the political legacy of Luis Muñoz Marín.
8. Puerto Rican historical archives and biographies documenting the death and legacy of Luis Muñoz Marín.

1890s — Gold, Rivers, and the Mountain Economy

Despite local lore surrounding gold mining in Río Blanco during the 1890s, substantial documentation of large-scale extraction during that period remains elusive. Oral histories speak of glimmering particles discovered in riverbeds and mountain streams, fueling dreams of hidden wealth deep within the Luquillo Mountains. Yet the reality appears to have been far more modest—small prospecting efforts scattered through rugged terrain rather than sustained commercial mining operations.[1]

By the late nineteenth century, the agricultural economy of Río Blanco and the surrounding Naguabo region was far more established than its mining activity. Sugarcane fields, citrus groves, coffee cultivation, and beekeeping shaped the rhythms of daily life. The mountains provided fertile soil and abundant water, while the rivers descending from El Yunque nourished farms, livestock, and small rural communities tucked between forest and valley.[2]

Twentieth-century geological studies later identified quartz veins cutting through the Tertiary volcanic rock formations known as the Río Blanco Formation. These veins—sometimes carrying traces of gold—were typically narrow, fragmented, and inconsistent in quality. Some reached nearly a meter in thickness, though many measured only a few centimeters across. Their mineral values remained generally low, preventing the development of major commercial mining operations.[3]

Even so, stories of gold persisted in the mountains. Rivers such as the Río Blanco, Río Sabana, and Río Prieto carried not only water from the rainforest, but also the imagination of those who searched their currents for fragments of fortune. In

places like Cubuy and Río Blanco, the legend of hidden gold became woven into the broader mythology of the forest itself—a landscape where mystery, survival, and memory have always flowed together.

1899 — Hurricane San Ciriaco

In August of 1899, Hurricane San Ciriaco swept across Puerto Rico with catastrophic force, becoming one of the deadliest hurricanes in Caribbean history. Torrential rains, violent winds, landslides, and flooding devastated towns, plantations, bridges, and mountain communities across the island, including Naguabo and the surrounding rainforest regions.[4]

The storm permanently altered both the landscape and the economy of eastern Puerto Rico. Rivers overflowed through valleys and mountain slopes, forests were stripped bare, and fragile agricultural systems collapsed almost overnight. In Naguabo, the destruction of Hacienda Quebrada Palma marked the effective end of major sugar production in the area.[5]

For communities near El Yunque and Barrio Cubuy, the hurricane became part of oral memory—one of those defining events by which generations later measured time: before San Ciriaco and after San Ciriaco. The rainforest, though wounded, slowly regenerated, continuing its eternal cycle of destruction and renewal.

19?? — The First Modern Mountain Homes Near Cubuy

(TO BE EXPANDED: identify dates, architects, builders, or first contemporary residences constructed near Barrio Cubuy and Río Blanco. Possible focus on early modernist or nature-integrated homes that helped shape the area's later artistic and bohemian identity.)

19?? — Visit of Luis Muñoz Marín

(TO BE EXPANDED: document and confirm the visit of Luis Muñoz Marín to Cubuy, Río Blanco, or the surrounding El Yunque region, including historical context and oral histories connected to the visit.)

1910 — La Casa de Piedra: A Historical Landmark in the Community of Florida

La Casa de Piedra stands along Route 191 at the entrance to the Florida sector of Río Blanco in Naguabo, Puerto Rico—a structure both humble and monumental, quietly embedded within the mountain landscape. The history of this remarkable building is deeply tied to Hacienda La Fe, an agricultural estate once owned by Gustavo Preston Lapelleux, whose lands extended across nearly 900 cuerdas of fertile terrain dedicated to sugarcane, citrus cultivation, and honey production.[6]

Born in Arroyo in 1856, Gustavo Preston Lapelleux was the son of Francis W. Preston, the Canadian consul to Spain in Puerto Rico, and Emma R. Lapelleux of the United States. In 1910, he assumed administration of Hacienda La Fe, further developing its agricultural operations within the lush foothills beneath El Yunque.[7]

Within the estate, the Preston family constructed what became known as La Casa de Piedra—a distinctive stone structure built directly into the earth itself. Two parallel stone walls framed the entrance to the neighborhood, while interior ovens were used to preserve fruits destined for export to the mainland United States. One section of the structure also provided temporary shelter for seasonal workers known locally as bulicos or aguadillanos, who slept in hammocks or directly upon the stone floors after long days of labor.[8]

The estate's activities extended beyond agriculture. Apiaries produced honey for export, and nearby structures—including one known as *El Empaquing*—served as storage and packing facilities for harvested crops. A small chapel was eventually established within La Casa de Piedra itself, where Masses were held for workers and nearby residents, transforming the structure into both an economic and spiritual center of the community.[9]

Water shaped the life of the building as much as stone did. Beneath La Casa de Piedra flows a natural spring, still active according to local residents. The presence of underground water directly beneath the structure heightened its strategic and symbolic significance, reinforcing the enduring relationship between settlement and water in the Cubuy and Río Blanco regions.[10]

Over time, La Casa de Piedra assumed many functions. Oral histories recount its use as a temporary jail, an administrative office for the Preston Company's citrus operations, and later as a field office for engineers during the construction of Route 191.[11] It also served as a pay station where local laborers received their wages. Naguabo resident Jimmy Piña recalls stories from his grandparents, who

traveled there to collect monthly payments of only thirty-five cents—a small amount that nonetheless carried the weight of survival in the rural mountain economy.[12]

Today, the weathered ruins of La Casa de Piedra remain standing at the entrance to the Florida community, one of the oldest surviving structures in the region and among the few still intact from that era. Moss now grows between its stones, and vines soften its walls, yet the structure continues to embody the layered history of Río Blanco and Cubuy—a place where agriculture, labor, migration, engineering, faith, and memory converged beneath the rainforest canopy.[13]

1910 — The Historic Puente de Florida

The historic Puente de Florida in Naguabo, Puerto Rico, was originally constructed in 1910 and served as a vital connection for communities living between Río Blanco, Florida, and the mountainous routes leading toward El Yunque. Built during a period when infrastructure expansion was slowly transforming eastern Puerto Rico, the bridge became both a practical crossing and a symbolic threshold into the rainforest interior.[14]

In 2022, after decades of exposure to tropical weather and structural deterioration, the bridge was carefully dismantled and relocated to a nearby public park within the Río Blanco community rather than demolished. The preserved structure now rests near the intersection of Camino La Planta and PR-191, close to one of the southern entrances to El Yunque National Forest.[15]

The preservation effort emerged through the work of local residents, municipal leadership, historians, architects, and community advocates who recognized the bridge not merely as infrastructure, but as part of the region's cultural memory. Figures including Mayor Noé Marcano, members of the Río Blanco Community Association, architect Luis Rodríguez, historian Carmen Rivera, and

representatives of Puerto Rico's Department of Transportation and Public Works contributed to ensuring its survival.[16]

It is important to distinguish the Puente de Florida from the separate Puente Histórico de Río Blanco (Bridge No. 194), another historic bridge spanning the Río Blanco nearby. Though often confused, each structure possesses its own distinct history and geographic identity within the mountainous landscape of Naguabo.[17]

Today, the restored bridge functions as both monument and memory—a reminder of the era when roads, rivers, and mountain crossings slowly connected isolated rainforest communities to the rest of Puerto Rico. Surrounded by lush vegetation and flowing waters, it remains part of the living story of Cubuy, Río Blanco, and the enduring relationship between human settlement and the forest.

Footnotes

1. Geological surveys and oral histories concerning placer gold prospecting in Río Blanco and the Luquillo Mountains during the nineteenth century.
2. Agricultural and economic records from eastern Puerto Rico documenting sugar, citrus, coffee, and beekeeping industries in Naguabo during the late nineteenth century.
3. Twentieth-century geological assessments of the Río Blanco Formation and mineral deposits in eastern Puerto Rico.
4. Historical records and meteorological studies concerning Hurricane San Ciriaco and its impact on Puerto Rico.
5. Regional agricultural histories documenting the destruction of Hacienda Quebrada Palma and the decline of sugar production in Naguabo after 1899.
6. Local historical documentation concerning Hacienda La Fe and the Preston Lapelleux family in Río Blanco and Florida, Naguabo.
7. Genealogical and municipal records related to Gustavo Preston Lapelleux and the Preston family estates in eastern Puerto Rico.
8. Oral histories collected in Río Blanco and Florida regarding La Casa de Piedra and seasonal agricultural workers.
9. Community accounts and local historical narratives concerning agricultural operations and religious activities at La Casa de Piedra.
10. Interviews and oral histories documented by Vázquez (2023) concerning underground water sources beneath La Casa de Piedra.
11. Suárez (2023); Piña-Martínez (2023); oral histories regarding the multiple historical uses of La Casa de Piedra.
12. Testimonies collected from residents of Naguabo concerning labor and payment practices associated with the Preston Company.
13. Suárez (2017); DESTINO 191 research materials and regional historical surveys.
14. Historical infrastructure records concerning the original construction of the Puente de Florida in 1910.
15. Puerto Rico Department of Transportation and Public Works (DTOP) and Río Blanco community preservation records regarding the bridge relocation project in 2022.
16. Community preservation initiatives and local municipal documentation concerning the protection of the Puente de Florida.

17. Historical bridge inventories and preservation studies distinguishing the Puente de Florida from Puente Histórico de Río Blanco (Bridge No. 194).

(MUST INTERVIEW CARMEN RIVERA AND LUIS RODRIGUEZ)

1926–1942 — The Construction of Road PR-191 and the Opening of the Southern Rainforest

Puerto Rico Highway 191 (PR-191) in Naguabo was constructed primarily between the late 1920s and the 1940s as part of a broader wave of infrastructure development aimed at improving access to the mountainous interior of eastern Puerto Rico. More than a roadway, PR-191 became a transformative corridor linking isolated rainforest communities—especially Barrio Cubuy—to the rest of the island.[1]

Winding through dense tropical forest, steep mountain slopes, and river valleys, PR-191 eventually became the principal gateway to the southern side of El Yunque National Forest, the only tropical rainforest in the United States National Forest System. Before its construction, Cubuy and neighboring sectors remained largely isolated, connected only by rugged footpaths, mule trails, river crossings, and difficult mountain routes. The road fundamentally altered the geography of daily life, facilitating transportation, communication, commerce, and eventually tourism.[2]

As PR-191 climbed through the rainforest, it revealed some of the most dramatic vistas in Puerto Rico. Travelers encountered panoramic views of the Caribbean Sea, mist-covered valleys, waterfalls cascading through dense vegetation, and mountains layered in endless shades of green. Scenic overlooks along the route transformed the road itself into part of the experience—an unfolding passage through cloud forest and tropical wilderness that continues to captivate visitors today.[3]

Yet the road also embodied a delicate negotiation between development and preservation. Heavy rainfall, landslides, erosion, and flooding constantly challenged engineers and maintenance crews. The route required continual reinforcement and adaptation in order to coexist with one of the wettest and most ecologically sensitive landscapes in the Caribbean.[4]

For the people of Cubuy, PR-191 represented both connection and transformation. What had once been a secluded mountain enclave slowly opened to new residents, researchers, conservationists, artists, travelers, and nature enthusiasts, while still retaining much of its remote spirit beneath the rainforest canopy.

1928 — Puente Histórico de Río Blanco

Built in 1928, the historic Puente de Río Blanco—officially known as Bridge No. 194 and often referred to locally as the *Puente Viejo de Río Blanco*—became one of the defining structures of the region. Constructed by the Virginia Bridge & Iron Company, the iron bridge featured a striking polygonal "W"-shaped truss spanning approximately 41.8 meters (137 feet) across the Río Blanco.[5]

The bridge served as a critical link between PR-31 and the developing Route 191 corridor, improving transportation between interior mountain communities and the coastal towns of eastern Puerto Rico. For residents of Río Blanco and Cubuy, it represented progress and reliability, replacing the dangerous necessity of crossing swollen rivers on foot or horseback during heavy rains.[6]

Over the decades, however, the tropical climate and constant exposure to flooding weakened the structure. Eventually, engineering assessments deemed the bridge critically unsafe, leading to its closure. Rather than accept demolition, community members organized the campaign *Defendiendo el Puente de Río Blanco*, advocating for the preservation of the bridge as part of Naguabo's cultural memory.[7]

Residents proposed transforming the surrounding area into a passive recreational and historical space, complete with interpretive signage, gazebos, gathering areas, and small local businesses. Their efforts reflected a broader desire to preserve not only a bridge, but the emotional and historical identity connected to it.[8]

In 2019, a temporary modular bridge measuring 150 feet was installed nearby at a cost of approximately $985,000 to maintain traffic flow while a permanent replacement was constructed. Then, in 2022, the historic iron structure was carefully dismantled and relocated adjacent to the new bridge rather than destroyed.[9]

The replacement bridge—a modern prestressed concrete structure approximately 65 meters long and elevated nearly three meters higher than the

original—was completed that same year. Funded through federal and local investment totaling approximately $11.51 million, the project generated 186 direct and indirect jobs while significantly improving transportation safety between the municipalities of Naguabo, Ceiba, and Fajardo.[10]

Though no longer carrying vehicles, the old iron bridge remains nearby as a contemplative monument suspended between memory and landscape—a relic of another era still watching over the Río Blanco.

1929–1930 — An Abandoned Vision: The Forgotten Railway and Hydroelectric Plant of Río Blanco

In the late 1920s, an ambitious infrastructure project emerged deep within the mountains of Naguabo. Built between 1929 and 1930, a railway system was constructed as part of an innovative hydroelectric initiative designed to harness the waters descending from the highlands of El Yunque.[11]

Developed by the Porto Rico Railway, Light and Power Company, the project centered around a hydroelectric plant in the Río Blanco region near the Florida sector of Naguabo. At the heart of the system was a remarkable funicular railway powered by a winch mechanism—an engineering achievement that allowed workers to transport equipment, construction materials, and machinery through extremely steep mountain terrain.[12]

The railway supported the construction and maintenance of dams, conduits, and water channels connecting the Cubuy, Sabana, Icacos, and Prieto rivers, all of which converge into the Río Blanco watershed. These mountain rivers, descending from the rainforest interior, became part of an early vision for renewable energy production on the island.[13]

Although much of the infrastructure still survives in fragments hidden beneath vegetation, the hydroelectric plant itself eventually fell into disuse. Various restoration efforts have been proposed over the years, though the facility remains inactive. Even so, the project continues to symbolize a forgotten chapter of innovation within the rainforest—a moment when engineering, industry, and nature briefly converged in the mountains of Cubuy and Río Blanco.[14]

Today, remnants of the railway and hydroelectric systems linger quietly within the forest, overtaken by moss, vines, and flowing water, as if the rainforest itself has slowly reclaimed the machinery once built to master it.

1930s — Trails Through the Rainforest

During the 1930s, the construction of trails throughout Cubuy, Río Blanco, and nearby sectors of El Yunque dramatically expanded access into the rainforest interior. Many of these routes were developed by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), whose workers carved pathways through steep slopes, river crossings, and dense tropical vegetation.[15]

Among the earliest and most important trails were the Río Sabana Trail and the Tradewinds Trail, both closely tied to what would later become the southern extension of PR-191. These trails formed the backbone of early access into Cubuy and the remote interior of the El Toro Wilderness.[16]

- **Río Sabana Trail** — Built during the 1930s and reopened in 2011, this trail begins along the southern extension of PR-191 in Naguabo. Originally serving as an access route into what is now the El Toro Wilderness, it connected forest interior pathways with the growing roadway system.
- **Tradewinds Trail** — A long and rugged route traversing the El Toro Wilderness, linking the Río Sabana Trail with broader networks extending deeper into El Yunque.

Additional trails and trailheads constructed during the CCC era included:

- **La Coca Trail** — Known for dense rainforest vegetation, muddy terrain, and frequent stream crossings.
- **La Mina Trail** — Beginning near the Palo Colorado Visitor Center, this moderate-to-difficult trail led to the famed La Mina Falls. It has remained closed since the devastation of Hurricane Maria.
- **Big Tree Trail** — A paved interpretive trail passing through groves of towering tabonuco trees before reaching the La Mina area, also heavily impacted after 2017.

These trails were more than recreational routes—they became corridors of exploration, scientific study, conservation, and cultural memory through the rainforest landscape.[17]

1934–1946 — Reforestation and the Reimagining of El Yunque

Between 1934 and 1946, Puerto Rico underwent one of the most significant reforestation efforts in its modern history. Historical records indicate that more than 29 million trees were planted throughout the island's forests during this period.[18]

By 1946, El Yunque had also received official designation as a wildlife refuge for Puerto Rico. Reforestation programs intensified, with approximately 22 tons of seeds distributed across the region while nearly 8,000 acres regenerated naturally under Forest Service protection.[19]

These efforts marked a profound cultural shift. The rainforest increasingly came to be viewed not merely as a source of timber, minerals, or agricultural land, but as a fragile ecosystem worthy of preservation, study, and reverence. Scientists, conservationists, archaeologists, and naturalists began to recognize El Yunque as both an ecological treasure and a living archive of Puerto Rican history and biodiversity.[20]

The forest slowly transformed in the public imagination—from exploitable territory into sacred natural heritage.

1938–1981 — Petroglyphs and Archaeological Sites Documented

Archaeological investigations conducted throughout the twentieth century revealed the extraordinary depth of Indigenous history embedded within the Río Blanco and Cubuy regions. Since the pioneering work of anthropologist Jessie Walter Fewkes in the early 1900s, researchers identified petroglyphs along the Río Blanco river system and surrounding mountain areas.[21]

Other scholars, including Samuel Lothrop, continued documenting these sites. In 1938, archaeologist Irving Rouseformally recorded the Icacos-Cubuy archaeological complex, identifying four principal locations designated as Naguabo #2, #3, #4, and #5.[22]

In 1960, Mónica Flaherty Frassetto published additional findings from the region, uncovering ceramics associated with the Ostionoide cultural period. Later, in 1973, José Oliver documented two significant petroglyph locations—La Mina I and La Mina II—whose differing artistic styles suggested the presence of multiple cultural influences or ceremonial periods.[23]

By 1981, Antonio Daubón had identified seven separate petroglyph sites along the Río Blanco riverbed. Together, these discoveries revealed a dense network of sacred and ceremonial spaces throughout the lower mountain regions of El Yunque.[24]

Within El Yunque National Forest itself, the only formally identified Taíno archaeological sites are petroglyph locations, all believed to have held sacred significance. Researchers suggest these sites were used primarily by Taíno behiques, or shamans, who performed rituals, ceremonies, and communication with spiritual forces associated with rivers, stones, caves, and mountains.[25]

Some sites appear to have accommodated large gatherings, while others may have served more private ceremonial, funerary, or ritual purposes. The diversity of styles and locations indicates that these sacred spaces evolved over long periods of Indigenous occupation and spiritual practice.[26]

Archaeological evidence from the region also includes lithic tools, ceramic fragments, kiln remains, and traces of historic occupation—including remnants associated with the Civilian Conservation Corps camps constructed along PR-191.[27]

Together, these discoveries affirm that Río Blanco, Cubuy, and the southern slopes of El Yunque are not merely scenic landscapes, but deeply layered cultural territories where rainforest, memory, spirituality, and history continue to converge.

Footnotes

1. Puerto Rico Department of Transportation and Public Works (DTOP) historical records regarding the construction and development of PR-191.
2. Historical accounts concerning transportation access and mountain communities in eastern Puerto Rico.
3. Tourism and ecological studies concerning scenic viewpoints and environmental characteristics along PR-191.
4. Engineering and environmental maintenance reports regarding flooding, erosion, and landslide mitigation along PR-191.
5. Historical bridge inventories and engineering documentation concerning Bridge No. 194 (Puente Viejo de Río Blanco).
6. Community histories and transportation records related to Río Blanco and Naguabo infrastructure development.
7. Community preservation campaign records: *Defendiendo el Puente de Río Blanco*.
8. Municipal and community redevelopment proposals concerning the preservation and reuse of the historic bridge site.
9. Puerto Rico infrastructure project documentation concerning the temporary modular bridge installation in 2019.
10. Federal and Puerto Rico government transportation project records regarding the 2022 Río Blanco bridge replacement.
11. Historical records of the Porto Rico Railway, Light and Power Company and hydroelectric infrastructure projects in eastern Puerto Rico.
12. Engineering histories documenting the funicular railway system constructed in Río Blanco between 1929 and 1930.
13. Hydrological and infrastructure records concerning the Cubuy, Sabana, Icacos, Prieto, and Río Blanco river systems.
14. Aponte (2011); DESTINO 191 research materials regarding the abandoned hydroelectric project.
15. U.S. Forest Service historical archives concerning the Civilian Conservation Corps in Puerto Rico.
16. El Toro Wilderness and Río Sabana Trail historical documentation.
17. U.S. Forest Service trail guides and historical records concerning La Coca, La Mina, and Big Tree Trails.

18. USDA & International Institute of Tropical Forestry (IITF), 2014.
19. U.S. Forest Service reforestation and wildlife refuge documentation concerning El Yunque.
20. Conservation and ecological studies regarding the changing public perception of El Yunque during the mid-twentieth century.
21. Jessie Walter Fewkes and early archaeological investigations in Puerto Rico.
22. Irving Rouse archaeological surveys of the Icacos-Cubuy sites (1938).
23. Mónica Flaherty Frassetto (1960); José Oliver (1973) archaeological reports.
24. Antonio Daubón archaeological documentation of Río Blanco petroglyph sites (1981).
25. USDA archaeological assessments and studies on Taíno ceremonial sites within El Yunque National Forest.
26. Ramos (1996); studies concerning Taíno ritual landscapes and petroglyph usage in eastern Puerto Rico.
27. Archaeological site assessments near Río Icacos, Highway 191, and former CCC camp

1955 — Arnaldo Roche Rabell is Born

On December 5, 1955, Arnaldo Roche Rabell was born in San Juan. He would later become one of Puerto Rico's most celebrated contemporary painters and an important figure within the Neo-Expressionist movement. Known for his psychologically charged imagery, layered symbolism, and tactile surfaces, Roche created deeply personal works that explored memory, identity, mythology, spirituality, masculinity, and the subconscious.[1]

Roche first studied at the Luchetti School of Art in San Juan before briefly pursuing architecture studies at the University of Puerto Rico. He later moved to Chicago, where he earned a Master of Fine Arts degree from the Art Institute of Chicago in 1984.[2]

Throughout his career, Roche developed a highly distinctive visual language, often incorporating his own body directly into the painting process by pressing, dragging, or imprinting his face and physical gestures onto the canvas. His work fused Caribbean memory, European art history, surrealism, autobiography, and emotional intensity into haunting dreamlike compositions that helped redefine contemporary Puerto Rican painting.[3]

Though primarily associated with urban and psychological landscapes, Roche's work—like that of many Puerto Rican artists of his generation—was also shaped by the island's relationship to memory, land, history, and myth. His paintings carried the same sense of layered identity that exists throughout places like El Yunque, Cubuy, and the mountains of eastern Puerto Rico, where personal history and collective memory often blur together beneath the tropical landscape.[4]

Roche died on November 17, 2018, in San Juan, leaving behind a body of work regarded as one of the most powerful contributions to contemporary Caribbean art.[5]

1958 — The La Mina Gold Occurrence

In 1958, a mineral deposit known as the *La Mina, Río Blanco gold occurrence* was identified by the Caguas Copper Company near Peña Pobre, within the municipality of Naguabo. Although local legends of gold in the Luquillo Mountains had circulated for centuries, this discovery represented one of the more formally documented mineral explorations in the region.[6]

Geological surveys revealed that the deposit consisted primarily of copper and pyrite, with only minor traces of gold. Despite periodic interest, the mineral concentrations proved too limited for profitable large-scale extraction, and no major mining operations were ultimately established.[7]

Even so, the discovery helped reinforce the long-standing mythology surrounding hidden minerals in the mountains surrounding Río Blanco and Cubuy. Stories of gold lingering beneath rainforest rivers and volcanic rock formations continued to circulate among local residents, blending geology with folklore in the collective imagination of the region.

1950s? — La Mina School and Community Center

Nestled within Barrio Cubuy, the building now known as the *Centro Comunitario La Mina* once served as the original Escuela La Mina, a small rural primary school established by the Puerto Rico Department of Education. Built during the expansion of public education into Puerto Rico's mountainous interior, the school was created to spare local children the difficult daily journey to the school in Florida and neighboring sectors.[8]

At a time when roads remained limited and transportation difficult, the school became much more than a classroom—it became a gathering place for the community itself. Children from scattered mountain homes arrived on foot along muddy paths and narrow roads that wound through rainforest slopes and rivers.

The building evolved gradually over time. In its early years, the school lacked a cafeteria, and meals were coordinated from Florida. Eventually, a small storage room was converted into a kitchen, where food was prepared and passed to

students through an opening in the wall—a humble yet meaningful gesture of care within an isolated rural community.[9]

In 1974, declining enrollment led to the school's closure, and remaining students were transferred to the Florida school. Despite these changes, much of the original structure remains standing today, with only the windows substantially altered over the years.[10]

Though no longer functioning as a school, the building continues to serve the community as a center for gatherings and local activities, preserving its role as a place of connection within Cubuy's social landscape.

(1967 Larry Bell visit to El Yunque? He grew flowers there? To interview Walter Otero about this)

19?? — Zoilo Méndez Moves to Cubuy

At some point during the mid-twentieth century, Zoilo Méndez became one of the important longtime residents of Barrio Cubuy, establishing himself within the growing mountain community that had begun attracting both local families and newcomers drawn to the rainforest's solitude and beauty.

Questions remain regarding the origins of the well-known colonial-style home associated with Méndez—whether it was constructed by him directly or whether portions of the structure predated his arrival. Oral histories suggest the house became an important gathering place within the community and may have played a role in hosting notable visitors to the region.

(MUST INTERVIEW ZOILO MÉNDEZ OR FAMILY MEMBERS)

1970s? — Luis Muñoz Marín Visits Cubuy

Luis Muñoz Marín (1898–1980), one of the most influential figures in modern Puerto Rican history, was known not only for his political leadership but also for his deep appreciation of Puerto Rico's natural landscapes, especially El Yunque and the island's mountain regions.[11]

According to oral histories that remain to be fully confirmed, Zoilo Méndez invited Muñoz Marín on several occasions to his colonial-style home in Barrio Cubuy. The connection may have been strengthened through Muñoz Marín's

second wife, Inés Mendoza, who was originally from Naguabo and maintained close ties to the region.[12]

Local residents still recount stories of the former governor spending time within the rainforest setting of Cubuy—walking through gardens, enjoying long outdoor lunches beneath the trees, and quietly appreciating the mountain atmosphere that surrounded the home. These recollections, preserved largely through oral memory, reveal a more intimate and personal side of Muñoz Marín's relationship with eastern Puerto Rico and its landscapes.

Whether entirely factual, partially embellished, or transformed through time, such stories have become part of Cubuy's living mythology—where memory, politics, hospitality, and rainforest folklore intermingle beneath the canopy.

(MUST INTERVIEW ZOILO MÉNDEZ OR OTHER PEOPLE WHO VISITED THE HOUSE DURING THIS PERIOD)

1970s? — The House Built Into the Waterfall

(TO BE RESEARCHED AND EXPANDED: identify who constructed the house built directly near or within the waterfall and dam area close to the current David Orr property. Oral histories suggest this structure became one of the most unusual and iconic residences in the region, reflecting the experimental and nature-integrated architecture that began appearing in Cubuy during the 1970s.)

Footnotes

1. Museum and biographical records concerning Arnaldo Roche Rabell and the Neo-Expressionist movement.
2. School of the Art Institute of Chicago archives and biographical documentation on Arnaldo Roche Rabell.
3. Exhibition catalogues and critical essays on Roche's painting techniques and symbolism.
4. Scholarly studies concerning memory, identity, and landscape in contemporary Puerto Rican art.
5. Obituaries, museum archives, and cultural institutions documenting the life and death of Arnaldo Roche Rabell.
6. occurrence near Peña Pobre, Naguabo.
7. Mining assessments and geological surveys related to copper, pyrite, and gold deposits in eastern Puerto Rico.
8. Puerto Rico Department of Education historical records concerning rural schools in Naguabo and Barrio Cubuy.
9. Oral histories collected by Piña-Martínez (2023) regarding Escuela La Mina and community life in Cubuy.
10. Community records and oral testimony regarding the closure of Escuela La Mina in 1974.
11. Historical and political biographies concerning Luis Muñoz Marín and his environmental interests.

12. Biographical records concerning Inés Mendoza and her connection to Naguabo and eastern Puerto Rico.
13. Geological reports concerning the La Mina Río Blanco mineral **1970**.

Route 191: Environmental Concerns and the Long-Term Closure of a Key Access Point to El Yunque

1970s — The Landslide That Changed El Yunque

(add images)

In the 1970s, after periods of intense tropical rainfall, a major landslide collapsed a critical section of Route 191 deep within El Yunque rainforest, severing what had once been a continuous roadway between the northern and southern sides of the forest.[1] What had begun decades earlier as an ambitious passage through the mountains suddenly became interrupted by the very landscape it attempted to cross.

The collapse transformed the geography of access to El Yunque forever. Once connected by a single route, the northern and southern regions of the rainforest became effectively separated, each developing its own rhythm, identity, and relationship to the forest. The northern side continued evolving into a more heavily visited recreational and tourism corridor, while the southern slopes—particularly around Río Blanco and Barrio Cubuy—remained quieter, more isolated, and increasingly protected by their own inaccessibility.

Plans to reconstruct the damaged roadway soon emerged, supported by sectors of the municipality of Naguabo, as well as agencies interested in restoring transportation access through the region.[2] For many local residents, reopening the road represented economic opportunity, improved mobility, and renewed connection between communities historically linked through the mountains.

Yet the proposed reconstruction quickly encountered strong opposition from environmental scientists, conservationists, and forestry officials, including researchers associated with the Institute of Tropical Forestry.[3] Critics warned that rebuilding the road through the unstable terrain could permanently damage fragile ecosystems, increase erosion, destabilize slopes, and negatively affect the Río Blanco watershed—an ecologically significant area containing some of Puerto Rico's oldest and least disturbed forest stands.[4]

The debate soon evolved into one of Puerto Rico's most symbolic confrontations between development and conservation. Environmental organizations argued that El Yunque's rainforest systems were too fragile to sustain major reconstruction efforts in the affected zone. Lawsuits followed, including legal

action initiated by the Environmental Defense Fund, which ultimately helped freeze the project indefinitely.[5]

Over time, nature itself began reclaiming the abandoned corridor. Vegetation engulfed sections of the roadway. Moss, vines, and roots slowly overtook broken pavement and retaining walls. What had once represented modern infrastructure gradually transformed into a kind of accidental ruin swallowed by the rainforest.

In 1992, after years of technical studies and stalled proposals, the U.S. Forest Service formally withdrew support for rebuilding the collapsed section, concluding that the terrain remained geologically unstable and unsafe for long-term reconstruction.[6] By then, Route 191 had already remained closed for so long that an entire generation had grown up knowing the road only as interrupted.

Ironically, the closure may have helped preserve the southern side of El Yunque more effectively than any formal conservation strategy alone.[7] The increased isolation limited large-scale tourism, commercial development, and heavy traffic, allowing communities like Cubuy and Río Blanco to retain much of their rural atmosphere, ecological integrity, and slower pace of life.

Today, the abandoned segment of Route 191 exists almost as a metaphor within the landscape—a reminder that, in El Yunque, nature ultimately determines the terms of permanence. The mountain closed the road, and the forest quietly reclaimed what had once been carved into its body.

1970s? — The House with the Large Pool

(add more images)

Hidden within the rainforest landscape of Cubuy stands one of the area's most curious and storied properties: a house remembered for its unusually large semi-Olympic swimming pool, constructed improbably within the mountainous terrain of the rainforest. According to oral histories, the residence belonged at one time to members of the Mathison family, heirs to a local coffee fortune connected to Puerto Rico's agricultural history.

Stories surrounding the property have long circulated within the community, blending memory, rumor, and local mythology. According to residents, the house was once inhabited by an Olympic gold medalist swimmer, whose presence allegedly inspired the construction of the expansive pool nestled within the tropical landscape. The contrast between the refined geometry of the pool and the surrounding untamed rainforest gave the property an almost surreal quality—as if a fragment of another world had been placed deep within the mountains of Cubuy.

(me)Artist Carlos Betancourt possesses reproductions of drawings associated with the property, depicting figures gathered around the pool and scenes of the surrounding rainforest. The illustrations evoke a kind of tropical modernist dreamscape—part retreat, part fantasy, suspended between luxury and wilderness.

Oral accounts also describe a tragic ending connected to the swimmer, who reportedly died following an accident involving a stingray or a related marine incident. Though details remain uncertain and require verification, the story has persisted through local memory, becoming part of Cubuy's layered oral folklore.

Additional accounts suggest that before the Mathison family's ownership, the property may have belonged to a dentist connected to the region, though names and dates remain unclear. Like many stories in Cubuy, fragments survive more vividly in conversation and recollection than in official documentation.

The house itself occupies an almost mythic place within local memory—a symbol of the strange intersection between isolation, wealth, artistry, nature, and personal reinvention that began quietly emerging in Cubuy during the second half of the twentieth century.

(me) Betancourt also possesses photographs of historical books from Naguabo that may contain additional information regarding the property and ownership timeline. Further interviews with Matthew Kavanaugh and longtime residents

may help clarify the stories surrounding the dentist, the swimmer, and the construction of the pool.)

(add images)

Footnotes

1. U.S. Forest Service historical reports concerning landslides and infrastructure damage along Route 191 in El Yunque during the 1970s.
2. Puerto Rico municipal and transportation records regarding proposed reconstruction efforts for PR-191.
3. Institute of Tropical Forestry reports and environmental assessments concerning El Yunque rainforest preservation.
4. Ecological studies related to the Río Blanco watershed and old-growth forest systems in southeastern El Yunque.
5. Environmental Defense Fund legal actions and related conservation disputes concerning Route 191 reconstruction.
6. USDA Forest Service and International Institute of Tropical Forestry documentation concerning the formal abandonment of reconstruction plans in 1992.
7. Quiñones et al. (2018), studies regarding conservation outcomes linked to restricted access on the southern side of El Yunque.

1972. Marianne Kavanaugh LaForce Arrives in Cubuy

Marianne Kavanaugh LaForce, originally from Opa-locka, Florida, moved to Puerto Rico with her son, Matthew Cobb Kavanaugh, during the 1960s—a period when many artists, intellectuals, and seekers were being drawn to the island's layered cultural identity and extraordinary landscapes. By the early 1970s, Marianne had acquired property in Barrio Cubuy, transforming it into a weekend refuge suspended between rainforest, river, and sky.

At the time, Cubuy remained deeply secluded—accessible, but still largely untouched by broader development. The property became part sanctuary, part gathering place, embodying the quiet spirit that would increasingly attract artists, environmentalists, travelers, and creative individuals seeking distance from urban life and proximity to nature.

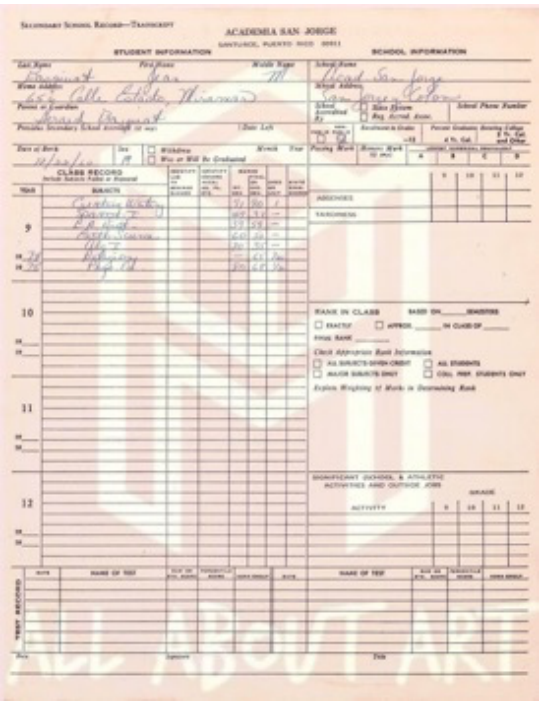
Over the years, the Kavanaugh property evolved into one of the most recognized and beloved places in Cubuy, eventually becoming associated with Casa Cubuy Eco Lodge, a site known for its relationship to the surrounding forest and its role in welcoming visitors into the southern slopes of El Yunque.

Marianne is currently 96 years old and still drives her pick up truck, goes on long hikes and attends community meetings in Naguabo.

(add images of Marianne and the rest of the neighbors)

(ADD iPhone video interview with Marianne and Matthew Kavanaugh. Investigate prior ownership of the property: Was it previously connected to the Fred Mueller compound? Did Fred Mueller arrive in Cubuy before the Kavanaugh family? Additional oral histories and property records may clarify the chronology.)

1974–1975. Jean-Michel Basquiat in Puerto Rico



Jean-Michel Basquiat (1960–1988), later recognized as one of the most influential artists of the late twentieth century, attended Academia San José in San Juan, Puerto Rico, during approximately 1974–1975, while living on the island with his family.[1]

Basquiat was born in Brooklyn, New York, on December 22, 1960, to a Haitian father, Gérard Basquiat, and a Puerto Rican mother, Matilde Andrades Basquiat, whose family roots connected him directly to Puerto Rico and Caribbean culture.[2] Though his time on the island was relatively brief, Puerto Rico formed part of the artist's early cultural and emotional landscape during his adolescence.

His family relocated to Puerto Rico for a period following his parents' separation. During those formative years, Basquiat was exposed not only to the island's

language and rhythms, but also to its layered histories of colonialism, race, spirituality, music, and Afro-Caribbean identity—subjects that would later echo powerfully throughout his work.[3]

Accounts from classmates and acquaintances describe Basquiat as intelligent, observant, restless, and artistically gifted even at a young age. While living in Puerto Rico, he continued drawing obsessively, absorbing imagery from comic books, anatomy texts, music culture, street life, and Caribbean visual traditions. Though little documentation survives from his artistic production on the island itself, Puerto Rico remained part of the broader Caribbean consciousness that informed his worldview and symbolic vocabulary throughout his career.

Years later, Basquiat would become internationally celebrated for paintings that fused text, anatomy, jazz, history, African diasporic identity, and raw expressive mark-making into a revolutionary visual language. Emerging first through New York's downtown graffiti movement under the tag SAMO, he quickly rose to prominence in the late 1970s and 1980s, collaborating with artists such as Andy Warhol and exhibiting internationally before his untimely death in 1988 at the age of twenty-seven.[4]

Though brief, Basquiat's connection to Puerto Rico remains a meaningful and often overlooked chapter in the artist's early life—a reminder of the Caribbean roots and cultural currents that helped shape one of the defining artistic voices of his generation.

A small number of photographs survive from Basquiat's years in Puerto Rico, capturing the future artist during his adolescence in San Juan—a formative Caribbean chapter that preceded his emergence as one of the defining artistic voices of the twentieth century.

Family photographs from his Puerto Rico years reportedly appeared in the exhibition Jean-Michel Basquiat: King Pleasure, *organized by his sisters and stepmother. The exhibition included personal archives, childhood photos, family home recreations, and materials from his Puerto Rican years.*

Footnotes

1. Academia San José school records and biographical accounts documenting Jean-Michel Basquiat's attendance in San Juan during the mid-1970s.
2. Phoebe Hoban, *Basquiat: A Quick Killing in Art*; Franklin Sirmans, writings on Basquiat's Caribbean heritage and family background.
3. Dieter Buchhart and Eleanor Nairne, studies on Basquiat's cultural influences and Caribbean identity.
4. Marc Mayer, *Basquiat* (Brooklyn Museum exhibition catalogue); various biographical studies on Basquiat's career and artistic development.

1970s–1980s. Fred Mueller's *Casa Flamboyant* in Cubuy

During the 1970s and 1980s, hidden deep within the rainforest folds of Barrio Cubuy, one property quietly evolved into a legendary gathering place within a sort of private artistic and cultural landscape: *Casa Flamboyant*, the tropical retreat of Fred Mueller, the influential co-founder of New York's renowned Pace Gallery.

Located at Kilometer 22.2 along Route 191 in Barrio Cubuy, Naguabo, the property sat suspended between mountain, river, and rainforest mist, approximately four kilometers from El Yunque National Forest and close to natural landmarks such as Charco El Hippie and the Río Sabana Trail. Though secluded, the estate became known among artists, collectors, musicians, actors, and intellectuals as a place of rare beauty, freedom, and imagination.

(MUST FIND OUT WHO ORIGINALLY OWNED AND BUILT THE HOUSE. Matthew Kavanaugh may know. Also determine how many surrounding parcels Fred Mueller owned. Oral histories suggest

the holdings may once have extended as far as the current David Orr property and possibly toward what is now Casa Cubuy Eco Lodge.)

Though formal documentation remains limited, oral histories recounted by longtime residents and friends—including Matthew Kavanaugh, Robin Hill, and Shirley Mooney—paint vivid portraits of those years. Casa Flamboyant became a kind of rainforest salon, hosting elegant gatherings where art, conversation, music, literature, and celebration flowed together beneath the tropical canopy.

The house itself was remembered for its understated sophistication. Decorated with remarkable taste yet without ostentation, the interiors blended antiques, tropical architecture, Asian objects, fine textiles, and important works of art into an atmosphere that felt simultaneously worldly and deeply connected to the surrounding forest. Oral accounts recall collections of Ming bowls, unusual furnishings, and artworks by internationally known artists, including pieces attributed to Leonora Carrington, whose mystical imagery seemed perfectly at home within Cubuy's enchanted landscape.

During this period, Casa Flamboyant reportedly welcomed an extraordinary constellation of visitors. Among them were photographer Robert Mapplethorpe; musician, actress, and Warhol associate Cherry Vanilla; and, according to local accounts still awaiting further verification, filmmaker Federico Fellini together with members of the *Satyricon* film circle, including actor Martin Potter. Actor John Phillip Law—known internationally for his role opposite Jane Fonda in *Barbarella*—also reportedly visited the property.

The estate additionally received legendary New York art dealer Robert Miller, who decades later would become the art dealer for Puerto Rican artist Carlos Betancourt. The later discovery that both Miller and Betancourt shared independent personal connections to Cubuy created an unexpected thread linking the rainforest community to New York's contemporary art world in remarkable ways.

(me, Artist Carlos Betancourt and Alberto Latorre possess photographs from this period provided by Cherry Vanilla, including images of the interiors, social gatherings, Ming bowls, and portions of the property.)

Fred Mueller himself remains an almost mythic figure within Cubuy's oral history. Adopted into a branch of the Gillette family inheritance, Mueller departed from the more conventional trajectory associated with much of the family—many of whom settled in Hawaii—and instead forged a life immersed within Puerto Rico's rainforest interior. A brilliant art historian, dealer, and aesthete, he lived openly as a gay man during a period when such visibility remained uncommon within elite social and art-world circles. Friends and visitors remember him as charismatic, intellectually sophisticated, theatrical, generous, and unforgettable.

Soon after acquiring the property, Mueller began transforming it into a true tropical sanctuary. He renovated the house extensively, reportedly adding its iconic triangular swimming pool, enlarging terraces, and developing lush gardens that blurred the boundaries between architecture and rainforest. Some accounts suggest architect George Warner may have contributed to portions of the property's design or later expansions, though this remains to be confirmed.

Mueller also imported exotic tropical plants from Hawaii and other regions, many of which adapted so successfully to Cubuy's humid climate that they spread naturally through nearby properties and landscapes over the following decades. In this way, even the botanical life of Cubuy still quietly carries traces of Mueller's presence.

Following Fred Mueller's death, the property eventually passed into the hands of Shirley Mooney of Chicago, who reportedly arranged its acquisition either through Mueller's estate or through surviving family members connected to Hawaii. The exact details of this transition remain partially undocumented and will require further interviews, legal research, property records, and personal correspondence to fully reconstruct.

(MUST INTERVIEW SHIRLEY MOONEY, Jennifer Johnson, Matthew Kavanaugh, Robin Hill, and other longtime residents regarding Fred Mueller, Casa Flamboyant, the guest histories, and adjacent properties.)

These images showcase his portrayal of the blind angel Pygar, highlighting his iconic winged costume and interactions with Jane Fonda's character, Barbarella. For more photos and information, you can explore the following resources: Getty Images

Here are several photos of **Cherry Vanilla** (Kathleen Dorritie), capturing her iconic glam-punk style from her heyday in the '70s and '80s. These images offer glimpses into her persona as a Warhol superstar, musician, and cultural provocateur:

Martin Potter

Footnotes

1. Oral histories and interviews from longtime Cubuy residents including Matthew Kavanaugh, Robin Hill, Shirley Mooney, and Jimmy Piña.
2. Historical references concerning Fred Mueller's role as co-founder of Pace Gallery, New York.
3. Oral accounts regarding visits by Robert Mapplethorpe, Cherry Vanilla, Martin Potter, Federico Fellini associates, John Phillip Law, and Robert Miller to Casa Flamboyant.
4. Cherry Vanilla photographic archives and personal photographs held by Carlos Betancourt and Alberto Latorre documenting Casa Flamboyant and related gatherings.
5. Property records and oral histories concerning Casa Flamboyant, adjacent parcels, and ownership transitions in Barrio Cubuy, Naguabo.

Fred Mueller was an early co-founder and partner of the New York branch of Pace Gallery, one of the most influential contemporary art galleries of the postwar era. In 1963, Mueller joined Arne Glimcher in expanding Pace from its original Boston location into New York City, helping establish the gallery during a transformative period in the international art world. Under their leadership, Pace became associated with many of the leading artists of the twentieth century and played an important role in shaping the visibility of contemporary American and international art. Although Mueller remained far less publicly visible than Glimcher, he is recognized in historical accounts of Pace Gallery as part of the gallery's foundational leadership during its formative years on East 57th Street in Manhattan.[1]

Footnotes

1. Historical records and institutional histories of Pace Gallery, including accounts of the gallery's 1963 New York expansion by Arne Glimcher and Fred Mueller

1970s–Present. Robin Hill (Robin Phillips): Guide of the Southern Rainforest

(add images)

By the 1970s and continuing for decades afterward, Robin Hill—also known as Robin Phillips—had become one of the quiet guardians of Cubuy and the southern reaches of El Yunque. Originally from the Naguabo region (to be confirmed through interview), Robin emerged as the community's beloved trail expert, rainforest guide, storyteller, and naturalist. Few people knew the hidden veins of the southern forest as intimately as he did. His knowledge extended through the Río Sabana corridor, the Tradewinds Trail, secluded waterfalls, forgotten footpaths, and river crossings known mostly to longtime residents and forest wanderers.

To hikers, ecotourists, artists, and curious travelers arriving in Cubuy, Robin often became the first human bridge into the rainforest itself. Guests repeatedly described him as a living encyclopedia of El Yunque—someone capable of seamlessly weaving together botany, oral history, ecology, weather patterns, Taíno lore, local memory, and practical survival knowledge into unforgettable journeys through the forest. One visitor reflected:

"We had three hikes… one of them with guide Robin Phillips, who is a world of knowledge as to the history and facts of the flora and fauna of El Yunque…"[1]

Robin also served during the earlier Cubuy years as caretaker and close local collaborator to Fred Mueller at Casa Flamboyant. He helped maintain the rainforest property, assisted visiting guests, and became deeply familiar with the constellation of artists, collectors, travelers, and cultural figures who passed through Cubuy during the 1970s and 1980s. Through Robin's memories survives part of the oral history of those gatherings—the dinners, stories, storms, waterfalls, eccentric visitors, and long conversations carried out beneath the rainforest canopy.

At Casa Cubuy Eco Lodge and throughout the southern corridor of Route 191, Robin became synonymous with a different experience of El Yunque: quieter, less commercial, more intimate and ancestral. Unlike the heavily visited northern sector of the rainforest, Cubuy offered silence, mist, rivers, and immersion. Robin guided visitors along hidden pools of the Sabana and Cubuy rivers, toward petroglyph sites near the confluence of the Icacos and Cubuy rivers, and through trails where the forest seemed untouched by time itself.

In many ways, Robin represented the spirit of Cubuy: deeply rooted in place, generous in knowledge, protective of nature, and resistant to spectacle. His contribution to the preservation and understanding of El Yunque's southern slopes remains largely undocumented in formal publications, yet it lives vividly in the memories of those he guided through the forest.

Ironically, the long-term closure of portions of Route 191—while controversial—helped preserve this quieter side of El Yunque from overdevelopment and mass tourism. Guides like Robin became essential cultural and ecological interpreters of this hidden rainforest world, helping countless visitors understand that Cubuy was not simply a destination, but a living ecosystem shaped equally by nature, memory, and community.

(MUST INTERVIEW ROBIN HILL / ROBIN PHILLIPS. Important oral histories include: Fred Mueller years; Casa Flamboyant gatherings; trails before and after Route 191 closure; petroglyph stories; ecological changes; visitors and artists; history of Río Sabana and Cubuy community.)

1981. Robert Mapplethorpe's Visit to Puerto Rico and Cubuy

In 1981, celebrated American photographer Robert Mapplethorpe visited Puerto Rico and spent time in Barrio Cubuy, staying at the rainforest residence now known as Casa Flamboyant. He had been invited by Fred Mueller, co-founder of Pace Gallery and a close associate of art dealer Robert Miller, who was also reportedly among the guests present during that period.

Surrounded by the dense tropical landscape of Cubuy, Mapplethorpe photographed waterfalls, towering palms, rainforest vegetation, rivers, and local figures immersed within the lush environment of El Yunque's southern slopes. According to oral accounts preserved by residents and visitors, some of the photographs included images of Matthew Kavanaugh posed near waterfalls in the area. Though these specific photographs have yet to be formally catalogued or publicly documented, their existence continues to circulate through the oral memory of Cubuy's artistic community.

Mapplethorpe's known Puerto Rico photographs from 1981 include works such as *Children, Puerto Rico, 1981*, part of his *50 Americans* portfolio, as well as *Palm Tree, Puerto Rico, 1981*, both of which confirm his photographic activity on the island during this period.[2]

The idea that one of the most influential photographers of the late twentieth century quietly wandered the waterfalls and trails of Cubuy has become part of the area's evolving mythology—an intersection of international art history and rainforest oral tradition.

Artist Carlos Betancourt's Search for the Lost Mapplethorpe Photographs of Cubuy




(add images)

For many years, Puerto Rican artist Carlos Betancourt searched for the photographs Robert Mapplethorpe was rumored to have taken in Cubuy. Stories of Mapplethorpe's stay at Fred Mueller's rainforest home had circulated among residents and friends for decades, yet tangible evidence remained elusive.

Then, sometime around 2014, during a solitary visit to Art Basel Miami Beach, Betancourt encountered an unexpected confirmation. Wandering through the fair late on closing day—a ritual he often enjoyed alone—he stopped at a booth presented by an Italian gallery. There, among a group of small black-and-

white photographs, he noticed an image of a waterfall that felt strangely familiar. Approaching closer, he read the caption:

Waterfall, Puerto Rico — Robert Mapplethorpe.

The discovery profoundly affected him. For Betancourt, it was more than simply encountering an artwork—it was the sudden validation of years of oral histories linking Mapplethorpe to Cubuy and Fred Mueller's rainforest gatherings. The photograph seemed to collapse myth and evidence into a single moment.

Moved by a sense of urgency and historical responsibility, Betancourt attempted to organize a group of collectors to acquire the photograph and potentially other works from Mapplethorpe's Puerto Rico series. Although those efforts were ultimately unsuccessful, the search continues.

Today, Betancourt remains committed to locating and preserving these images, seeing them not merely as photographs, but as fragments of an overlooked cultural history connecting Cubuy, Puerto Rico, and one of the twentieth century's most iconic photographers.

1980s. Cherry Vanilla Visits Casa Flamboyant

(add images)

During the 1980s and early 1990s, artist, performer, musician, and Warhol-era cultural icon Cherry Vanilla visited Fred Mueller at Casa Flamboyant in Cubuy. Her recollections—later shared with Carlos Betancourt and Alberto Latorre—offer another vivid thread connecting Cubuy to the broader creative underground orbit of New York, Warhol's Factory, glam rock, and early punk culture.

Around 2015, while visiting San Antonio, Texas, Carlos and Alberto attended a gathering where they unexpectedly met Cherry Vanilla. During conversation, Puerto Rico and Cubuy surfaced naturally, and to their astonishment, Cherry revealed that she too had spent time in the rainforest at Fred Mueller's home decades earlier. The coincidence felt almost surreal: yet another hidden connection tying Cubuy to international artistic circles.

Cherry shared stories of Fred Mueller's gatherings, the rainforest atmosphere, and the eclectic personalities who moved through Casa Flamboyant during those years. She also showed Carlos and Alberto rare personal photographs from her stays there, including images of the house, interiors, and social gatherings.

(QUESTION FOR EDITING: should this section remain chronologically in the 1980s, or partially move to the 2015 encounter between Cherry Vanilla, Carlos, and Alberto?)

Cherry Vanilla first emerged from the provocative creative world of Andy Warhol's Factory during the late 1960s and early 1970s. She became known through experimental theater, music, performance art, and publicity work surrounding figures such as David Bowie during his Ziggy Stardust era. Later she performed with her own punk band at legendary New York venues including CBGB and Max's Kansas City, becoming emblematic of the rebellious and theatrical spirit of that cultural moment. Her memoir, *Lick Me: How I Became Cherry Vanilla* (2010), chronicles this extraordinary journey through art, performance, sexuality, punk culture, and survival.[3]

1999? Casa Flamboyant Under Shirley Mooney

(add images)

Following Fred Mueller's passing, Shirley Mooney of Chicago acquired Casa Flamboyant and became the next steward of the rainforest property. Under her care, the house evolved into an intimate boutique retreat while preserving much of the artistic spirit and aesthetic sensibility established during Mueller's years there.

The colonial-style residence retained many of its antiques, artworks, furnishings, and heirlooms from the Fred Mueller era. Guests often described the atmosphere as elegant yet deeply connected to nature—less a hotel than a cultivated rainforest sanctuary suspended between art, memory, and wilderness.

Under Mooney's direction, Casa Flamboyant operated as a refined eco-lodge along Route 191 in Cubuy. Surrounded by tropical gardens, waterfalls, and forest trails, the property offered panoramic views extending toward the Caribbean Sea. The gardens originally begun by Fred Mueller were further expanded and lovingly maintained, while additional accommodations—including the celebrated "Rainbow Room"—were completed beneath the main structure.

Travel writers and visitors consistently praised the property for its extraordinary setting, tranquility, and personalized hospitality. Guests frequently recalled the sensation of stepping directly from the house into rainforest trails leading toward waterfalls, swimming pools, rivers, and hidden picnic clearings beneath the forest canopy.

Casa Flamboyant became known not only for its beauty, but for the remarkable constellation of artists, collectors, musicians, writers, environmentalists, architects, and travelers who passed through it over the years.

(MUST ADD PERSONAL STORIES AND INTERVIEWS: Carlos Betancourt and Alberto Latorre; Jennifer Johnson; Bruce Dempsey; Cucco Peña; Dora Díaz; Milly Gutiérrez; Walter Otero; César Reyes; and many others.)

19??. Noelia Restaurant Opens in Cubuy

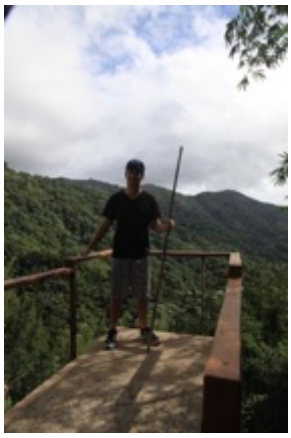
(add images)

(TO EXPAND: oral histories regarding Noelia restaurant/hut in Cubuy; founders, role within local community, travelers, artists, hikers, guides, and residents who gathered there; food traditions; relationship to Route 191 and rainforest culture.)

1990s? Rey and Lorna's Modernist Rainforest House

(add images)





At some point during the 1990s, Shirley Mooney sold an adjacent property near Casa Flamboyant to her close friends Rey and Lorna [last name to confirm], originally from Chicago. Passionate sailors, gardeners, and devoted stewards of the rainforest, the couple built a striking modernist residence dramatically integrated into the surrounding landscape.

Their home overlooks waterfalls, forest valleys, and dense rainforest canopy, appearing almost suspended within the mountain terrain itself. The property's elaborate network of pathways and trails was designed by Miami architect George Warner, carefully blending architecture with the existing topography and vegetation.

Known for their privacy and deep respect for nature, Rey and Lorna became part of Cubuy's evolving community of artists, environmentalists, and transplants who found in the rainforest a slower and more contemplative way of life.

(MUST INTERVIEW REY AND LORNA who still live in this house and George Warner who lives in Miami)

Footnotes

1. Visitor reviews and travel accounts referencing Robin Phillips as guide in El Yunque's southern region; Casa Cubuy Eco Lodge references and online travel forums.
2. Robert Mapplethorpe, *Children, Puerto Rico, 1981* and *Palm Tree, Puerto Rico, 1981*; Mapplethorpe Foundation archives and exhibition records.
3. Cherry Vanilla, *Lick Me: How I Became Cherry Vanilla* (2010); histories of Warhol Factory and early New York punk scene.

1998–1999. Peter Doig, César Reyes, and the Expanding Artistic Mythology of Cubuy and Naguabo

(add images)

By the late 1990s, the quiet mountains and waterfalls surrounding Cubuy and Naguabo had begun to attract not only travelers and collectors, but internationally recognized contemporary artists searching for landscapes capable of stirring memory, mystery, and imagination. Though much of this history survives primarily through oral accounts and personal recollections, these encounters helped weave Cubuy into a broader transnational artistic dialogue linking Puerto Rico, Europe, New York, and the Caribbean.

According to oral histories shared by artist Carlos Betancourt, during a period when he was house-sitting at Casa Flamboyant for Shirley Mooney, he invited prominent Puerto Rican collector César Reyes to visit the property. During that gathering, Reyes spoke about frequently bringing artist Peter Doig to swim in the waterfalls and rivers of Barrio Cubuy and Río Blanco. Betancourt also recalls references to possible visits by additional artists—perhaps even German painter Anselm Kiefer—though these details remain partially fragmented in memory and require further confirmation through interviews with César and Mima Reyes.

What is firmly documented is that Peter Doig visited Puerto Rico during the late 1990s, and that experience profoundly influenced his artistic evolution. Around

1998–1999, Doig created *The Heart of Old San Juan* (1999), a painting inspired by photographs, sketches, and impressions gathered during his time on the island. The work depicts a glowing basketball court suspended within the dreamlike atmosphere of Old San Juan, illuminated by tropical evening light and saturated color. Art historians often identify this moment as pivotal in Doig's transition away from the icy Canadian landscapes that had initially defined much of his career and toward the humid, psychologically charged atmospheres of the Caribbean that would later dominate his work.[1]

The possibility that Doig also experienced the rivers, forests, and waterfalls of Cubuy through César Reyes adds another poetic layer to this transformation. One can imagine the artist moving between the dense greens of El Yunque, the shifting tropical light, and the surreal emotional textures that later emerged in his paintings.

César Reyes—a psychiatrist, collector, patron, and longtime supporter of contemporary art—alongside his wife Mima Reyes, cultivated one of Puerto Rico's most important private artistic circles during this period. Their remarkable residence in Naguabo, designed by artist and architect Jorge Pardo, became both sanctuary and gathering place for artists visiting Puerto Rico. Though there is no fully documented record confirming extended stays by Doig at the Reyes residence, several paintings from that period, including *Black Curtain (Towards Monkey Island)*, evoke visual atmospheres strongly associated with views from the property and surrounding landscapes.

The Reyes' orbit extended far beyond a single artist. British-Nigerian painter Chris Ofili also spent time in Naguabo and reportedly joined excursions with César Reyes to nearby Monkey Island, experiences that later informed aspects of his celebrated monkey-themed works and tropical imagery.[2] The circle additionally included artists such as Rirkrit Tiravanija and Martin Creed, whose works became part of the Reyes collection and home.

Together, these encounters transformed Naguabo and Cubuy into something more than geographic locations. They became sites of artistic pilgrimage—spaces where rainforest, memory, architecture, conversation, rivers, and art converged into a uniquely Puerto Rican creative landscape.

(MUST INTERVIEW CÉSAR AND MIMA REYES regarding visits by Peter Doig, Chris Ofili, possible Anselm Kiefer connection, Monkey Island excursions, and artistic gatherings in Naguabo.)

2000. Casa Cubuy Eco Lodge: Marianne LaForce and Matthew Kavanaugh

By the year 2000, Marianne LaForce and her son Matthew Kavanaugh transformed their long-private rainforest property into what would become Casa Cubuy Eco Lodge—an intimate eleven-room ecological retreat perched above the Cubuy River at approximately 1,500 feet elevation within the southern boundary of El Yunque.

Originally acquired decades earlier as a secluded weekend refuge amid the rainforest mountains, the property evolved slowly and organically, guided by a philosophy that emphasized coexistence with nature rather than domination of it. Rustic architecture, open-air spaces, river access, and ecological sensitivity became defining elements of the lodge's identity. The name "Cubuy," often interpreted through oral tradition as "wherever you step, there is water," perfectly reflected the spirit of the place: rivers, rainfall, waterfalls, springs, mist, and endless green abundance.

Casa Cubuy quickly distinguished itself from traditional tourism on the island. Rather than offering spectacle or luxury detached from the environment, it immersed guests directly into the rhythms of the rainforest itself—its sounds, storms, insects, rivers, darkness, and silence.

Matthew Kavanaugh became one of the principal storytellers and informal historians of the region. Deeply connected to the land and fascinated by the area's layered history, he shared with visitors countless stories about Cubuy's trails, waterfalls, hidden fruits, neighboring properties, former residents, artists, bohemian visitors, and the practical realities of building within the steep rainforest terrain. His knowledge blended oral history, ecology, architecture, folklore, survival, and lived experience.

Among the stories Matthew often recounted was his childhood memory of artist Robert Mapplethorpe photographing him in the waterfalls near Cubuy during the early 1980s—a story that would later deeply resonate with Carlos Betancourt.

Matthew also remembered receiving a painting by surrealist artist Leonora Carrington as a gift from Fred Mueller. At the time, Carrington's market had not yet experienced the extraordinary rise in international recognition it would later achieve. According to oral accounts, the work was once submitted to Sotheby's or Christie's auction house with little success, eventually selling privately for under $5,000. Today, Carrington's paintings command prices in the millions, transforming this anecdote into another almost mythical story within Cubuy's artistic folklore.

Leonora Carrington (1917–2011) was one of the major figures of Surrealism, known for her dreamlike paintings, feminist symbolism, mystical narratives, and deeply imaginative worlds blending mythology, animals, alchemy, and transformation. Born in England, she later settled in Mexico, where she became a central figure in Latin American surrealist circles.[3]

(NEED TO CONFIRM DETAILS regarding the Carrington painting sale and identify whether Sotheby's or Christie's handled the submission.)

2000. Carlos Betancourt and Alberto Latorre Discover Cubuy

Around the year 2000, artist Carlos Betancourt and architect Alberto Latorre stayed at Casa Cubuy for the first time, meeting Marianne LaForce and Matthew Kavanaugh—an encounter that would profoundly shape their relationship to the rainforest for decades to come.

Although both Carlos and Alberto had previously passed through Cubuy during childhood drives and family excursions, this marked their first immersive experience truly living within the rainforest environment.

That first visit unfolded almost like an initiation. They hiked through El Bosque Enano, climbed the Sabana Trail, explored rivers and waterfalls, and spent long hours listening to Matthew and Marianne recount stories of Cubuy's history, visitors, artistic connections, environmental realities, and legendary personalities. The rainforest became not merely scenery, but an active psychological and spiritual presence.

Matthew spoke passionately about the engineering challenges of building safely on the steep mountainsides, about hidden fruits deep within the forest, about storms, landslides, old trails, and the unusual people who had sought refuge or inspiration in Cubuy throughout the years. Marianne and Matthew became living archives of the region's oral history.

Among the stories that most deeply moved Betancourt were those linking Cubuy to Robert Mapplethorpe, Fred Mueller, Casa Flamboyant, forgotten photographs, artists, and the mysterious cultural undercurrents hidden within the rainforest.

The experience left a lasting imprint on both Carlos and Alberto. Cubuy became not simply a destination, but an emotional and creative landscape to which they would continually return.

(NEED TO EXPAND FURTHER: specific hikes, waterfalls, meals, guests, early friendships, storms, discoveries, artistic influence, photographs, and yearly visits.)

2001–2008 (and continuing to present). Artistic Pilgrimages into the Rainforest

From 2001 onward, Carlos Betancourt and Alberto Latorre returned repeatedly to Cubuy and Casa Cubuy Eco Lodge, often several times per year. Over time, these journeys evolved into a kind of ongoing pilgrimage—bringing friends, artists, writers, collectors, architects, and travelers into direct contact with Puerto Rico's rainforest interior.

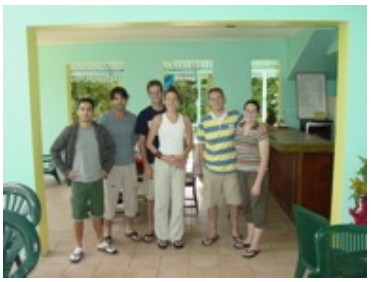
Among those who visited during these years were Inaguaral poet Richard Blanco, Puerto rican composer and Grammy winner Cucco Peña, along with many others (to further add here) who encountered Cubuy for the first time through Carlos and Alberto's invitations.

The rainforest increasingly entered Betancourt's artistic vocabulary. Works such as *Three Pointer in El Río Blanco*(2002), *Petroglyphs and Surfer Shorts* (2003), and *Bejigante en Casa Flamboyant* (2006) emerged directly from these experiences and later appeared in exhibitions, museum presentations, and the monograph *Carlos Betancourt: Imperfect Utopia* published by Skira/Rizzoli.[4]

During one of the early visits, the group explored old dams, hidden waterfalls, El Hippie, and the mountain home of a local figure known as Bigote. Along these journeys, they encountered what would later become symbolic landmarks within Betancourt's visual language: the "Three Pointer" rock and a sacred Ceiba tree whose emotional and spiritual resonance continues to endure.

Today, both locations remain active sites of return and remembrance for Carlos and Alberto. Joined now by newer friends and landowners in Cubuy such as Jackeline and Kevin Price, these visits continue to layer memory upon memory—turning the landscape itself into a living archive of friendship, creativity, and shared experience.

The rainforest of Cubuy became, for Betancourt and Latorre, not merely inspiration but collaborator: a place where art, memory, spirituality, ecology, friendship, and oral history continually intersect.



(NEED TO EXPAND YEAR BY YEAR with photographs, stories, artworks, visitors, discoveries, and changing landscape.) Add many other artworks from CB and other artists. Add photos of farmers, jibaros, social workers, etc.

Footnotes

1. Auction records and exhibition histories for Peter Doig's *The Heart of Old San Juan* (1999); analyses of Doig's Caribbean transitional period.
2. Art Basel and exhibition references regarding Chris Ofili's Puerto Rico visits and Monkey Island inspirations connected to César Reyes.
3. Biographical and auction records concerning Leonora Carrington and the later rise in value of her artworks.
4. *Carlos Betancourt: Imperfect Utopia* (Skira/Rizzoli), including artworks inspired by Cubuy and El Yunque.

20??. Robin Hill Leads Betancourt, Latorre, and Ana Denise Miranda into the Hidden Heart of Cubuy

At some point in the early 2000s, rainforest guide Robin Hill led Carlos Betancourt, Alberto Latorre, and Ana Denise Miranda on an unforgettable journey deep into the southern mountains of El Yunque—a hike that would become part adventure, part revelation, and part spiritual encounter with the landscape itself.

The trail unfolded slowly through dense tropical vegetation, crossing slippery stones, hidden streams, and tunnels of towering green ferns beneath the constant soundtrack of coquí frogs and moving water. More than a hike, it felt like an initiation into another rhythm of Puerto Rico—one where time moved according to rivers, rain, mist, and memory rather than clocks or roads.

After several hours traversing steep rainforest terrain, the group finally arrived at a place known locally as *La Piscina*: a breathtaking natural infinity pool suspended high within the mountains near an old dam structure believed to date to the early hydroelectric and Civilian Conservation Corps era.[1] From the edge of the water, the forest seemed endless. Clouds drifted through the valleys below, waterfalls echoed in the distance, and the silence carried a strange immensity—simultaneously peaceful and overwhelming.

For Betancourt and Latorre, the experience was transformative. The landscape did not feel merely scenic; it felt alive, charged with memory and presence. The rainforest seemed to dissolve boundaries between past and present, between human experience and the natural world.

On the return journey, Robin guided the group to a nearby parcel of land that had quietly become available for purchase. Hidden within the property stood a massive boulder carved with ancient Taíno petroglyphs—its surface marked by symbols weathered by centuries of rain, moss, and silence. The carvings appeared suspended somewhere between disappearance and permanence, silently preserving fragments of a worldview older than colonial history itself.[2]

Moved deeply by the encounter, Carlos Betancourt began photographing the rock extensively. For him, the petroglyphs represented far more than archaeological artifacts. They embodied continuity—evidence that memory can survive through symbols, landscape, and ritual. Photographing them became part of his larger artistic practice: the preservation and reinterpretation of ancestral traces within contemporary visual language.

This experience would leave a lasting emotional imprint on both Betancourt and Latorre. It was after this hike—after standing before those carved stones, after experiencing the remoteness and spiritual force of the rainforest—that they first began seriously imagining the possibility of acquiring a small piece of land in Cubuy themselves. The rainforest was no longer simply a place they visited. It had begun quietly calling them back.

The journey also reinforced something fundamental that would later shape this manuscript itself: Cubuy's power lies not only in its physical beauty, but in its ability to connect seemingly distant worlds—ancient and contemporary, artistic and ecological, personal and collective. Here, the rainforest becomes more than scenery. It becomes collaborator, witness, archive, and storyteller.

(ALBERTO LATORRE AND I, Carlos Betancourt, should continue adding memories and reflections from these hikes throughout the manuscript. Additional interviews or recorded conversations may also help preserve details of this formative period.)

20??. Jackeline and Kevin Price Discover Cubuy

Sometime in the early 2000s or later (date to confirm), Jackeline and Kevin Price visited Cubuy for the first time while staying at Casa Cubuy Eco Lodge. Like many who arrived in the southern rainforest almost accidentally, they soon found themselves captivated by the area's unusual atmosphere—its rivers, waterfalls, isolation, artistic community, and profound intimacy with nature.

Over time, the Prices developed a deep connection to the region and eventually acquired land in Cubuy, becoming part of the evolving constellation of residents, artists, travelers, conservationists, and caretakers who have shaped the community across recent decades.

Today, they remain closely tied to the landscape and to the growing network of friendships and shared histories surrounding Cubuy. Their continued presence reflects a recurring pattern within the rainforest community: visitors arrive seeking nature, but often leave transformed by something far less easily defined.

(MUST INTERVIEW JACKELINE AND KEVIN PRICE regarding first visits, land acquisition, memories of Casa Cubuy, relationship with Carlos and Alberto, and experiences in the rainforest over the years.)

200?. Siddhia and Stanley Hutchinson in Cubuy

Artist Siddhia Hutchinson, originally from Boston, first visited Puerto Rico decades ago and eventually developed a deep bond with both Vieques and the rainforest region of Cubuy. Together with her husband, architect Stanley Hutchinson, she became part of the artistic and bohemian community that quietly flourished along the southern slopes of El Yunque.

The couple divided their time between Vieques and Cubuy, where they owned a remarkable rainforest residence that, as of 2025, belongs to David [last name to confirm]. The property itself became legendary within local oral history—not only because of its dramatic setting, but because of its unusual architectural and cultural evolution over time.

Stanley Hutchinson made extensive additions and renovations to the property, including the expansion of a striking semi-Olympic pool originally associated with the Mathison family, heirs to a local coffee fortune. According to longstanding oral histories, the property had once belonged to—or been inhabited by—an Olympic gold medalist swimmer, perhaps explaining the existence of such an unexpectedly large pool hidden deep within the rainforest mountains.

(me) Carlos Betancourt possesses reproductions of drawings reportedly created by someone associated with the house, depicting figures around the pool area and the surrounding tropical landscape. Another story—part tragedy, part myth—claims that the swimmer later died in an accident involving a stingray or related marine incident, though details remain uncertain and require further verification.

Other oral accounts connect earlier ownership of the property to a local dentist, though names and dates remain unclear. These fragments continue to circulate within Cubuy's layered oral history, where memory often survives through storytelling rather than documentation.

Siddhia maintained a studio on the property and occasionally offered art lessons beneath a canopy near the waterfalls flowing through the expansive

rainforest grounds. Carlos Betancourt and Alberto Latorre visited frequently, and Siddhia would often sketch casually at Casa Flamboyant alongside Betancourt, Latorre, and other friends and visitors.

Together, Siddhia and Stanley also founded and operated the Siddhia Hutchinson Fine Art Gallery in Isabel Segunda, Vieques, a space dedicated to Caribbean-inspired artwork, sculpture, ceramics, jewelry, and local artistic production.[3] Stanley's architectural sensibility complemented Siddhia's artistic practice, creating environments deeply integrated with landscape, light, and tropical atmosphere.

The couple also became known for their commitment to community life and animal rescue efforts in Vieques and Puerto Rico more broadly.

(MUST INTERVIEW SIDDHIA AND STANLEY HUTCHINSON. Carlos and Alberto possess numerous photographs documenting the property and gatherings there throughout the years.)

2004Carlos Betancourt and Alberto Latorre Discover Casa Flamboyant

In 2004, while staying at Casa Cubuy, Carlos Betancourt and Alberto Latorre visited Casa Flamboyant for the first time and met its owner at the time, Shirley Mooney. By then, they had already heard numerous stories about both Shirley and the legendary rainforest house from friends and longtime visitors to Cubuy.

One close friend, Rosa [last name to confirm], had previously described her intimate wedding at Casa Flamboyant and urged them repeatedly to visit what she called a magical hidden paradise in the rainforest.

Not long afterward, they finally made the trip.

The experience was immediate and uncanny. As Carlos and Alberto wandered through the courtyard and gardens, the place felt strangely familiar—as if they had somehow already known it. Then came the moment that transformed the visit into something almost surreal.

Positioned prominently within the courtyard were two large Ming Dynasty bowls filled with water lilies.

Carlos froze.

For years, his New York art dealer Robert Miller had spoken affectionately about those very bowls while recounting stories of his visits to Fred Mueller's rainforest home in Puerto Rico. Suddenly, Carlos realized this was the exact house Miller had described to him countless times.

The revelation triggered a cascade of unexpected connections.

Carlos Betancourt—now represented by the same Robert Miller who had once championed Robert Mapplethorpe—found himself creating artwork within the very rainforest environment where Mapplethorpe himself had photographed waterfalls and tropical landscapes decades earlier as a guest of Fred Mueller.[4] The synchronicities felt too emotionally precise to dismiss as coincidence.

For Betancourt and Latorre, Casa Flamboyant began revealing itself not merely as a beautiful property, but as a crossroads of artistic memory—a place where histories, friendships, artworks, stories, and creative lineages unexpectedly converged across generations.

Their friendship with Shirley Mooney deepened quickly and endured for decades. They became frequent guests at Casa Flamboyant, often returning repeatedly and at times helping care for the property while Shirley was away. Through these stays, they accumulated an expanding archive of stories, photographs, memories, creative projects, dinners, storms, gatherings, and experiences deeply tied to the rainforest landscape.

Casa Flamboyant gradually evolved into an informal creative sanctuary for Betancourt and Latorre. Surrounded by waterfalls, orchids, tropical gardens, rivers, and constant rain, Betancourt created several significant artworks there, including *Sunday Afternoon in El Yunque* (2008) and *The Enchanted Garden* (2008), later reproduced in his monograph *Imperfect Utopia*.[5]

The property also became fertile ground for conversations about future public art projects, architecture, sculpture, memory, and nature—many ideas emerging directly from the emotional atmosphere and mysterious beauty of Cubuy itself.

(TO EXPAND: Robert Miller's stories about Fred Mueller and the Ming Dynasty bowls; the emotional symbolism of discovering the house; creative work produced there; storms, gatherings, dinners, and long-term friendship with Shirley Mooney.)

Footnotes

1. Historical references to hydroelectric infrastructure and Civilian Conservation Corps activity in the Río Blanco and Cubuy regions appear in U.S. Forest Service and Puerto Rico infrastructure records from the 1930s–1940s.
2. Archaeological surveys conducted in the Río Blanco, Icacos, and Cubuy regions throughout the 20th century documented multiple Taíno petroglyph sites associated with ceremonial and sacred activity.
3. Siddhia Hutchinson Fine Art Gallery operated in Isabel Segunda, Vieques, featuring Caribbean-inspired artwork, crafts, and local artistic production.

4. Robert Mapplethorpe photographed in Puerto Rico during the early 1980s, producing works including *Children, Puerto Rico* (1981) and tropical landscape studies associated with the island.
5. Carlos Betancourt, *Imperfect Utopia* (Skira/Rizzoli, 2015), including artworks created in and inspired by Cubuy, Casa Flamboyant, and El Yunque.

20??. Robin Hill Leads Betancourt, Latorre, and Ana Denise Miranda into the Hidden Heart of Cubuy

At some point in the early 2000s, rainforest guide Robin Hill led Carlos Betancourt, Alberto Latorre, and Ana Denise Miranda on an unforgettable journey deep into the southern mountains of El Yunque—a hike that became part adventure, part revelation, and part spiritual encounter with the landscape itself.

The trail unfolded slowly through dense tropical vegetation, across slippery river stones, hidden streams, and tunnels of towering green ferns beneath the constant soundtrack of coquí frogs and moving water. More than a hike, it felt like an initiation into another rhythm of Puerto Rico—one where time moved according to rivers, rain, mist, and memory rather than clocks or roads.

After several hours traversing steep rainforest terrain, the group finally reached a place known locally as *La Piscina*: a breathtaking natural infinity pool suspended high within the mountains, near an old dam structure believed to date to the early hydroelectric and Civilian Conservation Corps era.[1] A small floating bridge crossed the water, while the remains of concrete infrastructure emerged quietly from the jungle, slowly reclaimed by moss, vines, and time.

From the edge of the water, the forest seemed endless. Clouds drifted through the valleys below, waterfalls echoed in the distance, and the silence carried a strange immensity—simultaneously peaceful and overwhelming. The experience felt almost otherworldly: raw, untouched, ancient, and profoundly liberating.

For Betancourt and Latorre, the landscape did not feel merely scenic; it felt alive—charged with memory, history, and presence. The rainforest seemed to dissolve boundaries between past and present, between human experience and the natural world.

On the return journey, Robin introduced the group to a nearby parcel of land that had quietly become available for purchase. Hidden within the property stood a massive boulder carved with ancient Taíno petroglyphs, its surface marked by symbols weathered by centuries of rain, moss, and silence. The carvings appeared suspended between disappearance and permanence, silently preserving fragments of a worldview older than colonial history itself.[2]

Moved deeply by the encounter, Carlos Betancourt spent time photographing the stone, attempting to capture not only its physical details but also the emotional and symbolic resonance it carried. For him, the petroglyphs represented far more than archaeological remnants. They embodied continuity—evidence that memory survives through symbols, landscape, ritual, and storytelling. Photographing them became part of his broader artistic practice: preserving and reinterpreting ancestral traces within a contemporary visual language.

This hike, like so many moments in Cubuy, revealed the rainforest's extraordinary ability to connect seemingly distant worlds—the ancient and the contemporary, the ecological and the artistic, the personal and the collective. Here, the forest becomes more than scenery. It becomes collaborator, witness, archive, and storyteller.

It was after this hike, and after visiting that parcel of land, that Betancourt and Latorre first began seriously imagining the possibility of acquiring a small piece of Cubuy themselves. The rainforest was no longer simply a place they visited. It had begun quietly calling them back.






(ALBERTO LATORRE AND I, Carlos Betancourt, should continue adding memories and reflections from these hikes throughout the manuscript. Additional interviews or recorded conversations may also help preserve details of this formative period.)

20??. Jackeline and Kevin Price Discover Cubuy

Sometime in the early 2000s or later (date to be confirmed), Jackeline and Kevin Price visited Cubuy for the first time, staying at Casa Cubuy Eco Lodge. Like many who arrived almost accidentally into the southern rainforest of El Yunque, they soon found themselves captivated by the region's singular atmosphere—its waterfalls, rivers, isolation, artistic spirit, and profound intimacy with nature.

Over time, the Prices developed a deep connection to the landscape and eventually acquired land in Cubuy, becoming part of the evolving constellation of residents, artists, travelers, caretakers, and storytellers who have shaped the community across recent decades.

Today, they remain closely tied to the land and to the growing network of friendships and shared histories surrounding Cubuy. Their presence reflects the continuing evolution of the community: a place where newcomers often arrive as visitors but gradually become guardians of memory and landscape themselves.

(MUST INTERVIEW JACKELINE AND KEVIN PRICE regarding first visits, land acquisition, memories of Casa Cubuy, relationship with Carlos and Alberto, and experiences in the rainforest over the years.)

200?. Siddhia and Stanley Hutchinson in Cubuy

Artist Siddhia Hutchinson, originally from Boston, first visited Puerto Rico decades ago and eventually formed a deep bond with both Vieques and the rainforest region of Cubuy. Together with her husband, architect Stanley Hutchinson, she became part of the artistic and bohemian community that quietly flourished along the southern slopes of El Yunque.

The couple divided their time between Vieques and Cubuy, where they owned a significant rainforest residence that, as of 2025, belongs to David [last name to confirm]. The property itself became legendary within local oral history—not only because of its dramatic setting, but because of its unusual architectural and cultural evolution over time.

Stanley Hutchinson made extensive and architecturally notable additions to the property, including the expansion of a striking semi-Olympic pool originally associated with the Mathison family, heirs to a local coffee fortune. According to longstanding oral histories, the property had once belonged to—or been inhabited by—an Olympic gold medalist swimmer, which may explain the existence of such an unexpectedly large pool hidden deep within the rainforest mountains.

(me)Carlos Betancourt possesses reproductions of drawings reportedly created by someone associated with the house, depicting figures gathered around the pool area and the surrounding tropical landscape. Another story—part tragedy, part myth—claims that the swimmer later died in an accident involving a stingray or similar marine incident, though details remain uncertain and require further research.

Other oral accounts connect earlier ownership of the property to a local dentist, though names and dates remain unclear. These fragments continue to circulate within Cubuy's layered oral history, where memory often survives through storytelling as much as through official documentation.

Siddhia maintained a studio on the property and occasionally offered art lessons beneath a canopy near the waterfalls that flowed through the expansive rainforest grounds. Carlos Betancourt and Alberto Latorre visited

frequently, and Siddhia would often sketch casually at Casa Flamboyant alongside Betancourt, Latorre, and other friends and visitors.

Together, Siddhia and Stanley also operated the Siddhia Hutchinson Fine Art Gallery in Isabel Segunda, Vieques, a gallery dedicated to Caribbean-inspired artwork, sculpture, ceramics, jewelry, photography, and local artistic production. Stanley's architectural sensibility complemented Siddhia's artistic practice, creating spaces deeply integrated with landscape, light, and tropical atmosphere.

The couple also became known for their commitment to community life and animal rescue efforts in Vieques and Puerto Rico more broadly, extending their creative and humanitarian work beyond the walls of the studio and gallery.

(MUST INTERVIEW SIDDHIA AND STANLEY HUTCHINSON. Carlos and Alberto possess numerous photographs documenting the property and gatherings there throughout the years.)

2004. Carlos Betancourt and Alberto Latorre Discover Casa Flamboyant

In 2004, while staying at Casa Cubuy, Carlos Betancourt and Alberto Latorre visited Casa Flamboyant for the first time and met its owner at the time, Shirley Mooney. By then, they had already heard countless stories about both Shirley and the legendary rainforest house from friends and longtime visitors to Cubuy.

One close friend, Rosa [last name to confirm], had previously described her intimate wedding at Casa Flamboyant and urged them repeatedly to visit what she called a magical hidden paradise in the rainforest.

Not long afterward, they finally made the trip.

The experience was immediate and uncanny. As Carlos and Alberto wandered through the courtyard and gardens, the place felt strangely familiar—as though they had somehow already known it. Then came the moment that transformed the visit into something almost surreal.

Positioned prominently in the courtyard were two large Ming Dynasty bowls filled with water lilies.

Carlos froze.

For years, his New York art dealer Robert Miller had spoken affectionately about those very bowls, describing them in stories about his visits to Fred Mueller's

rainforest home in Puerto Rico. Suddenly, Carlos realized that this was the exact house Miller had described to him countless times.

The revelation triggered a cascade of uncanny connections.

Carlos Betancourt—now represented by the same Robert Miller who had once championed Robert Mapplethorpe—found himself creating artwork in the very rainforest environment where Mapplethorpe himself had photographed waterfalls and tropical landscapes decades earlier as a guest of Fred Mueller. The synchronicities felt too emotionally precise to dismiss as coincidence.

For Betancourt and Latorre, Casa Flamboyant began revealing itself not merely as a beautiful property, but as a crossroads of artistic memory—a place where stories, friendships, artworks, and creative lineages unexpectedly converged across generations.

They quickly formed a close and lasting friendship with Shirley Mooney, a bond that endured for decades. They became frequent visitors to Casa Flamboyant, often returning repeatedly and at times caring for the property for extended periods while Shirley was away. Through these stays, they accumulated a growing archive of stories, photographs, dinners, storms, gatherings, artworks, conversations, and deeply personal memories tied to the rainforest landscape.

Casa Flamboyant gradually evolved into an informal creative sanctuary for Betancourt and Latorre. Surrounded by waterfalls, orchids, tropical gardens, rivers, and constant rain, Betancourt created several important artworks there, including *Sunday Afternoon in El Yunque* (2008) and *The Enchanted Garden* (2008), later reproduced in his monograph *Imperfect Utopia*.[3]

The property also became fertile ground for conversations about future public art projects, architecture, sculpture, memory, and nature—many ideas emerging directly from the emotional atmosphere and mysterious beauty of Cubuy itself.

Over time, Betancourt began to understand that this land held significance not only as a place of inspiration, but as a place where histories converge and survive through human connection. Perhaps, he felt, he and Latorre were meant not only to be inspired by the rainforest, but also to help preserve and document its extraordinary stories before they disappeared into obscurity.

(TO EXPAND: Robert Miller's stories about Fred Mueller and the Ming Dynasty bowls; creative work produced there; storms, dinners, gatherings, artistic visitors, and long-term friendship with Shirley Mooney.)

Brief Footnotes

1. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) operated extensively in El Yunque during the 1930s and 1940s, constructing trails, dams, roads, and forest infrastructure still visible today.
2. Numerous Taíno petroglyph sites have been documented throughout Río Blanco and the southern slopes of El Yunque by researchers including Irving Rouse, José Oliver, and Antonio Daubón.
3. Carlos Betancourt, *Imperfect Utopia* (Skira/Rizzoli), includes artworks and imagery connected to Cubuy, El Yunque, and Casa Flamboyant.

2005?. Casa Designed by Jorge Pardo for César and Mima Reyes in Naguabo

Perched high on a lush hillside overlooking the Caribbean Sea, the residence of art collectors César and Mima Reyes in Naguabo stands as one of Puerto Rico's most extraordinary intersections of contemporary art, architecture, landscape, and tropical living. Designed by renowned Cuban-American artist Jorge Pardo and completed around 2005, the house was conceived not simply as a residence, but as a total work of art—an immersive environment where architecture, color, light, and nature exist in constant dialogue.[1]

Pardo, internationally celebrated for dissolving the boundaries between sculpture, design, architecture, and installation, approached the Reyes residence almost as a cinematic composition. The house unfolds through bold planes of color, open-air transitions, sliding glass walls, metal grating, tiled surfaces, and carefully framed views of both rainforest and sea. Rather than resisting the tropical climate, the structure embraces it fully: rain, humidity, wind, shadows, and changing light become active participants in the experience of the home.



Constructed primarily of concrete, tile, steel grates, and glass, the residence incorporates elements long associated with Caribbean tropical architecture while simultaneously reflecting Pardo's unmistakable visual language. Brilliant reds, yellows, and blues animate the interiors, while circular skylights and perforated metal surfaces allow rainstorms and shifting sunlight to transform the atmosphere throughout the day. During periods of heavy rain, water occasionally enters portions of the structure—not as flaw or inconvenience, but as part of the architecture's living relationship with the environment itself.

The home quickly became an important gathering place for artists, collectors, curators, architects, and musicians visiting Puerto Rico. Filled with contemporary art, books, conversation, and tropical light, the residence developed into a kind of informal cultural salon hidden within the mountains of eastern Puerto Rico.

Among its notable visitors was painter Peter Doig, whose time in Puerto Rico during the late 1990s and early 2000s coincided with a major transformation in his artistic vocabulary. Works such as *Black Curtain (Towards Monkey Island)* appear visually and atmospherically linked to the views, vegetation, and emotional landscape surrounding the Reyes property and nearby areas of Naguabo.[2]

British-Nigerian artist Chris Ofili also visited the Reyes family and reportedly accompanied César Reyes on excursions to nearby Monkey Island—experiences later associated with aspects of Ofili's tropical and monkey-themed imagery.[3] Other artists connected to the Reyes circle included Rirkrit Tiravanija, Martin Creed, and numerous collectors and cultural figures who passed through the house over the years.

The Reyes residence became more than a private home. It evolved into a meeting point where contemporary art, Puerto Rican landscape, friendship, collecting, and creative exchange converged in deeply personal ways.

(MUST INTERVIEW CÉSAR AND MIMA REYES AND EXPAND ON THE DESIGN PROCESS WITH JORGE PARDO, GATHERINGS AT THE HOUSE, VISITING ARTISTS, AND CONNECTIONS TO NAGUABO AND CUBUY.)

2005–2006?. Río Blanco, Petroglyphs, El Tapón, and the Lower Riverbeds

During another visit to Casa Cubuy in the mid-2000s, Carlos Betancourt and Alberto Latorre hiked deep into the lower riverbeds of Río Blanco to explore petroglyph sites, hidden charcos, waterfalls, and areas near the home of a local resident known as Bigote.

The journey unfolded through slippery river stones, dense vegetation, and crystal-clear pools carved into the mountains over centuries of flowing water. Along the way, they encountered places known locally as *El Tapón* and other secluded swimming areas hidden beneath the rainforest canopy.

Guiding them toward the petroglyphs was a kind and charismatic local teenager connected to Bigote's household, whose intimate knowledge of the river trails reflected the oral traditions and lived relationship longtime residents maintained with the landscape.

The petroglyphs themselves appeared almost suspended between archaeology and myth. Carved into large river stones softened by water, humidity, moss, and time, the symbols seemed less like distant artifacts and more like living presences still embedded within the river's memory.

Carlos and Alberto photographed extensively throughout the excursion, documenting not only the carvings themselves but also the atmosphere surrounding them: filtered tropical light, moving water, wet stones, shadows, and dense vegetation that gave the site its profound emotional force.

(PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THIS HIKE THAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED HERE.)







2006?. Betancourt, Latorre, Walter Otero, and the Reyes Residence

Before spending time at Casa Flamboyant in Cubuy, artist Carlos Betancourt, architect Alberto Latorre, and influential Puerto Rican art dealer Walter Otero visited the home of César and Mima Reyes in Naguabo.

The house—designed by Jorge Pardo—left a deep impression on the group. Its seamless integration of architecture, contemporary art, color, landscape, and tropical atmosphere created an experience unlike that of a traditional residence. The structure itself seemed suspended somewhere between sculpture and inhabitable space.

During the visit, Betancourt photographed César, Mima, and their daughter in a series of intimate and informal portraits. These images later became the basis for

a portrait work created by Betancourt, capturing the family within the warmth and personal atmosphere of the house.

The gathering reflected the interconnected nature of Puerto Rico's contemporary cultural landscape during those years: artists, collectors, curators, architects, dealers, and friends moving fluidly between San Juan, Naguabo, Vieques, El Yunque, and Cubuy, creating communities of exchange often outside institutional frameworks.

After leaving the Reyes residence, the group traveled into the mountains toward Casa Flamboyant and Cubuy, continuing their exploration of the rainforest's layered artistic, ecological, and cultural histories.

2000's?. Noelia's Restaurant

Hidden quietly along Route 191 near Río Blanco, Noelia's Restaurant became one of the most beloved gathering places in the Cubuy region—a small, deeply personal restaurant tucked within the rainforest landscape and remembered as much for its warmth and hospitality as for its food.

Run almost entirely by Noelia herself, the restaurant developed a near-mythic reputation among hikers, artists, locals, travelers, and returning visitors who discovered it through word of mouth. Reaching it often felt like finding a secret hidden in the mountains.

The atmosphere was intimate and unmistakably Puerto Rican: rustic tables, vintage decorations, open-air seating, rainforest views, and the constant sound of rain and coquí frogs filtering through the surrounding vegetation. Many guests described the experience less as eating in a restaurant and more as being welcomed into someone's home.

Noelia became known for preparing traditional Puerto Rican dishes from scratch using fresh local ingredients. Signature meals included rabbit turnovers, fresh grouper fillet, octopus salad, mofongo, rice and beans, homemade desserts, and her much-loved sangria, often remembered long after visitors left the rainforest.

Customer reviews consistently emphasized the deeply personal attention Noelia gave every table. Children were welcomed warmly, conversations flowed naturally between strangers, and meals unfolded slowly according to the rhythms of the mountains rather than the pace of the city.

Guests staying at nearby Casa Cubuy Eco Lodge frequently considered a visit to Noelia's essential to the Cubuy experience, with Marianne and Matthew Kavanaugh often directing travelers there after long hikes through El Yunque.

For Carlos Betancourt and Alberto Latorre, Noelia's became one of the emotional anchors of life in Cubuy. Over the years, they brought countless friends, artists, collectors, curators, architects, and travelers there, introducing them not only to the food, but to the spirit and hospitality of the region itself.

(MUST INTERVIEW NOELIA. ADD STORIES OF VISITS WITH FRIENDS, ARTISTS, CURATORS, COLLECTORS, AND FAMILY THROUGH THE YEARS.)

(MUST ALSO ADD OTHER LOCAL RESTAURANTS AND SMALL BUSINESSES IN THE AREA, INCLUDING PICA FLOR, WHERE MANY VISITORS WERE ALSO TAKEN.)

2009?. Betancourt and Latorre Begin Bringing Friends to Casa Flamboyant

Around 2009, Carlos Betancourt and Alberto Latorre began regularly inviting close friends, collectors, curators, artists, and collaborators to experience Cubuy and Casa Flamboyant for themselves.

Among the notable guests during this period were Puerto Rican collectors César and Mima Reyes, owners of the Jorge Pardo-designed residence in Naguabo, as well as collector Chilo Andreu and his late wife Milly Andreu. Joining them was art dealer and gallerist Walter Otero, who represented Betancourt and played an important role within Puerto Rico's contemporary art community.

These visits became part gathering, part retreat, and part cultural exchange. Days often unfolded between hikes, rivers, conversations, meals, music, and long evenings beneath the rainforest canopy. Casa Flamboyant increasingly functioned as an informal creative sanctuary where friendships deepened and

ideas circulated freely between art, architecture, ecology, memory, and Puerto Rican identity.

(MUST EXPAND WITH STORIES, PHOTOGRAPHS, DINNERS, HIKES, GATHERINGS, AND MEMORIES FROM THESE YEARS.)

2010?. Jennifer Johnson, Joe Duke, and the Growing Web of Coincidences







Around 2010, Betancourt and Latorre continued hosting prominent guests at Casa Flamboyant, including collectors and longtime friends Jennifer Johnson and Joe Duke of the Johnson & Johnson family, as well as Gabrielle and Bruce Dempsey from Florida.

Their visits included dinners at local favorites such as Pica Flor and Noelia's Restaurant, hikes through the rainforest, swimming excursions, and stays divided between Casa Flamboyant, Casa Cubuy Eco Lodge, and eventually El Conquistador Resort.

During Jennifer Johnson's visit, Betancourt and Latorre uncovered yet another extraordinary coincidence connecting Casa Flamboyant to their larger artistic and personal world.

For years, Carlos and Alberto had told Jennifer about a rainforest bed-and-breakfast in Puerto Rico whose elegant yet unpretentious atmosphere reminded them deeply of her own refined taste and aesthetic sensibility. When Jennifer finally arrived at Casa Flamboyant, she immediately understood what they meant and felt an unexpected emotional connection to the property.

That evening, during dinner, Jennifer casually asked Shirley Mooney about the previous owner of the house.

When Shirley answered: "Fred Mueller," Jennifer was stunned.

Years earlier, Jennifer's very first condominium purchase in New York had been a unit previously owned by Fred Mueller himself, whom her family had known socially. She had long admired his sophisticated but understated approach to interiors and collecting.

Once again, the group found themselves astonished by the uncanny and recurring threads connecting Betancourt, Latorre, Fred Mueller, Robert Miller, Casa Flamboyant, Cubuy, and their extended artistic circle across decades and geography.

The coincidences no longer felt random. Rather, they seemed to suggest that the rainforest itself was quietly preserving and reconnecting histories through the people drawn to it.

(MUST EXPAND FURTHER ON THIS PERIOD, INCLUDING VISITS, GATHERINGS, CONVERSATIONS, AND ADDITIONAL CONNECTIONS.)

2010?. Preservation Efforts in Naguabo

Around 2010, Shirley Mooney became involved with a group of local preservationists working to restore and preserve a Victorian-era house along the malecón of Naguabo.

The effort reflected a broader concern for preserving the architectural and cultural heritage of eastern Puerto Rico, particularly structures vulnerable to abandonment, storms, and changing economic conditions.

(FIND MORE INFORMATION ON THIS HOUSE, THE PRESERVATION GROUP, AND SHIRLEY MOONEY'S INVOLVEMENT.)

2011. Río Sabana Recreation Area Reopens

Located south of El Yunque National Forest along Route 191, the Río Sabana Recreation Area reopened in 2011, offering dramatic views of the Río Blanco watershed and renewed public access to rivers, trails, and rainforest landscapes.

The reopening marked an important collaborative effort between the U.S. Forest Service, the Municipality of Naguabo, the Puerto Rico Aqueduct and Sewer Authority (AAA), and the Puerto Rico Electric Power Authority (AEE)—the first time these entities jointly managed a public project together.[4]

The site included cabins for overnight stays, parking areas, picnic facilities, and trail access into the southern section of El Yunque. Though currently closed to vehicles due to landslides, the area remains accessible by foot and continues to hold deep ecological and historical significance.

According to oral histories shared by Naguabo historian Carlos Osvaldo Suárez in 2023, the area was believed to have served as a place of refuge and rest for Taíno communities. Later, Spanish explorers reportedly referred to the surrounding mountains as *La Corona del Rey* ("The King's Crown"), supposedly because the mountaintops resembled the shape of a crown.[5]

2015?. Rick and Florin Acquire Casa Flamboyant

Around 2015, Shirley Mooney sold Casa Flamboyant to Ricardo Miranda and Florin Lepadatu, known affectionately as Rick and Florin.

After many years of persistence—and nearly a decade of discussions—Carlos Betancourt and Alberto Latorre also succeeded in purchasing a nearby ten-acre parcel from Shirley during this same period, further deepening their connection to Cubuy and the surrounding rainforest.

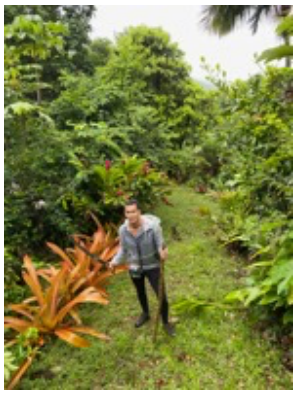
Under Rick and Florin's stewardship, Casa Flamboyant evolved into an even more refined boutique eco-retreat while carefully preserving its intimate and authentic atmosphere. The couple enhanced the guest experience through thoughtful renovations, personalized hospitality, gourmet breakfasts, and careful attention to the surrounding landscape.

The retreat continued offering access to nearby rivers, swimming holes, rainforest trails, and waterfalls, attracting travelers seeking a quieter and more personal relationship with El Yunque and Cubuy.

Over time, Casa Flamboyant became widely recognized as one of Puerto Rico's hidden gems—a place valued not for luxury in the conventional sense, but for atmosphere, beauty, intimacy, and emotional resonance.

Eventually, the property was sold again and returned to private residential use, ending its long chapter as a beloved boutique retreat.

2015?. Betancourt and Latorre Acquire Land in Cubuy



Around 2015, Puerto Rican artist Carlos Betancourt and architect Alberto Latorre acquired a parcel of land in Barrio Cubuy that had originally formed part of the larger Casa Flamboyant property owned by Shirley Mooney.

In his 2015 monograph *Imperfect Utopia*, Betancourt references the recent acquisition of several acres in Puerto Rico that had become a profound source of inspiration for his artistic practice.[6] He frequently described the rainforest as his true studio—a place of ongoing renewal, contemplation, experimentation, and emotional connection.

The landscape of Cubuy and El Yunque deeply informed many of Betancourt's artworks during this period, influencing his use of light, memory, tropical imagery, nature, and spiritual symbolism. Both Betancourt and Latorre continued strengthening their personal and creative ties to Puerto Rico through the land itself, integrating ecological and cultural references from the rainforest into their artistic and architectural work.

That same year, Betancourt presented a major retrospective exhibition at the Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico, where numerous works inspired by Cubuy and the rainforest environment were exhibited prominently, revealing the profound influence the region had already begun exerting on his artistic evolution.

Brief Footnotes

1. Jorge Pardo (b. 1963) is a Cuban-American contemporary artist known internationally for merging architecture, sculpture, furniture, and installation into immersive environments.
2. Peter Doig's Caribbean-influenced works from the late 1990s and early 2000s are often associated with Puerto Rico and later Trinidad, where tropical atmosphere became central to his visual language.
3. Chris Ofili's visits to Puerto Rico and Monkey Island with César Reyes have been referenced in interviews and contemporary art publications discussing his tropical influences.
4. Río Sabana Recreation Area reopening information sourced from regional and U.S. Forest Service reports regarding the 2011 interagency collaboration.
5. Oral history interview with Naguabo historian Carlos Osvaldo Suárez (2023).
6. Carlos Betancourt, *Imperfect Utopia* (Skira/Rizzoli, 2015).

2015–2017. Allora & Calzadilla's *Puerto Rican Light (Cueva Vientos)*

In September 2015, internationally recognized Puerto Rican artist duo Jennifer Allora and Guillermo Calzadilla unveiled *Puerto Rican Light (Cueva Vientos)*, a long-term installation hidden within a remote limestone cave inside the protected natural reserve of El Convento, on Puerto Rico's southern coast between Guayanilla and Peñuelas.[1]

Commissioned by the Dia Art Foundation in collaboration with Para la Naturaleza, the project remained open from September 23, 2015—the autumnal equinox—through January 31, 2018. The installation reimagined Dan Flavin's iconic fluorescent sculpture *Puerto Rican Light (to Jeanie Blake)* (1965/1969), relocating a version of the work deep inside a cave system powered entirely by solar energy collected outside the cavern.

Visitors reached the site only through guided hikes and carefully organized small-group excursions, transforming the journey itself into part of the artwork. The experience of walking through dry southern forest terrain before descending into the darkness of the cave created a dramatic transition between sunlight and artificial illumination, geology and technology, ancient landscape and contemporary art.

Inside the cave, the glowing pink, yellow, and red fluorescent lights appeared almost ceremonial—hovering somewhere between minimalist sculpture, sacred ritual, and prehistoric cave painting. The installation evoked themes of energy, migration, colonialism, ecology, and Puerto Rican identity, while also transforming Dan Flavin's industrial vocabulary into something unexpectedly spiritual and site-responsive.[2]

The project marked the first long-term Dia Art Foundation installation outside the continental United States since Joseph Beuys's *7000 Eichen* in Germany. A bilingual publication accompanying the project brought together philosophers, historians, and cultural theorists reflecting on electricity, biosemiotics, colonial history, light, and Puerto Rico's environmental realities.

Ultimately, *Puerto Rican Light (Cueva Vientos)* stood as one of the island's most poetic contemporary art installations of the decade—a haunting convergence of cave, light, history, and landscape suspended deep within the geological body of Puerto Rico itself.

2016. Klaus Biesenbach, Papo Colo, and *Procesión Migración* at the Edge of El Yunque

Artist Papo Colo leads *Procesión Migración*.

In 2016, curator Klaus Biesenbach collaborated with Puerto Rican artist Papo Colo to produce *Procesión Migración*, a large-scale ecological procession staged near the edge of El Yunque National Forest. Part ritual, part performance, and part communal pilgrimage, the event explored migration, ecology, displacement, spirituality, and Puerto Rican identity through movement within the rainforest landscape.[3]

At the time, Biesenbach served as Chief Curator-at-Large at Museum of Modern Art and director of MoMA PS1. Under his direction, the procession transformed rivers, forest trails, waterfalls, and clearings into stages for ephemeral actions and symbolic tableaux.

Several hundred participants moved collectively through the rainforest environment, eventually concluding near Papo Colo's foundation by the Río Espíritu Santo. The event functioned simultaneously as ecological reflection, cultural affirmation, protest, ceremony, and celebration.

For many participants—including Carlos Betancourt and Alberto Latorre—the procession reinforced the profound connection between Puerto Rico's landscape and contemporary artistic expression. The rainforest ceased functioning merely as backdrop; it became performer, witness, collaborator, and living archive.

(MUST EXPAND WITH PERSONAL STORIES, PHOTOGRAPHS, CONVERSATIONS, AND EXPERIENCES FROM CARLOS AND ALBERTO.)

2017. Hurricane Maria Strikes Puerto Rico and Barrio Cubuy

On September 20, 2017, Hurricane Maria made landfall in Puerto Rico as a devastating Category 4 storm, permanently altering both the physical and emotional landscape of the island.

Among the hardest-hit regions was Barrio Cubuy in Naguabo, where the mountainous rainforest terrain intensified the isolation that followed the hurricane. Massive landslides collapsed roads, bridges disappeared beneath floodwaters, towering trees snapped or uprooted entirely, and communications vanished almost overnight. Entire communities became inaccessible for weeks.

In Cubuy, residents suddenly found themselves cut off from electricity, running water, gasoline, food deliveries, medical access, and outside communication. Yet amid the destruction, the community responded with remarkable resilience. Neighbors cleared roads by hand, shared generators and food, checked on elderly residents, carried supplies across damaged terrain, and rebuilt together in ways that reflected the deep communal bonds long characteristic of Puerto Rico's rural mountain regions.

The rainforest itself bore visible scars for years afterward. Trails disappeared beneath fallen trees, riverbeds shifted, hillsides collapsed, and entire sections of forest canopy were stripped open by the winds. Yet within months, green growth began returning with astonishing force, revealing both the fragility and regenerative power of tropical ecosystems.

2017. The Betancourt-Latorre Foundation Hurricane Maria Relief Effort

In Miami, the Betancourt-Latorre Foundation—led by artist Carlos Betancourt and architect Alberto Latorre—responded rapidly to the humanitarian crisis unfolding in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria.

The Foundation organized large-scale relief efforts collecting thousands of pounds of food, bottled water, batteries, generators, medicine, baby supplies, and emergency necessities that were shipped directly to Puerto Rico, including aid sent specifically to Naguabo and surrounding communities. In addition to material donations, the Foundation also distributed direct financial support to families affected by the disaster.

Among those personally assisted was Robin Phillips, beloved rainforest guide and longtime Cubuy resident, whose family faced severe hardship in the aftermath

of the storm. Betancourt and Latorre delivered direct financial assistance as part of a broader effort to support residents of the rainforest corridor who had lost homes, employment, transportation, or access to essential services.

The relief effort became not only humanitarian, but deeply emotional—a reaffirmation of the enduring ties between Puerto Rico and its diaspora, and of the responsibility many Puerto Ricans living abroad felt toward the island during one of the darkest moments in its modern history.

(INCLUDE PHOTOGRAPHS, DOCUMENTATION OF SHIPMENTS, COMMUNITY STORIES, AND ADDITIONAL RECOVERY EFFORTS.)

2018?. Cucco Peña and Dora Díaz Visit Casa Flamboyant

Around 2018, renowned Puerto Rican composer and musician Cucco Peña and his future wife Dora Díaz visited Casa Flamboyant as guests of Carlos Betancourt and Alberto Latorre.

The visit unfolded within the atmosphere that had long defined Casa Flamboyant: rainforest dinners, rivers, conversations, waterfalls, music, stories, and the constant sound of rain moving through the forest canopy. Like many visitors before them, Cucco and Dora experienced Cubuy not simply as a destination, but as a place that dissolved ordinary rhythms and encouraged reflection, intimacy, and connection.

(MUST INTERVIEW CUCCO PEÑA AND DORA DÍAZ ABOUT THIS VISIT.)

2018?. Carlos Betancourt Brings His Parents to Casa Flamboyant

Sometime around 2018, Carlos Betancourt brought his parents, Teresa and Enrique Betancourt, to experience Cubuy, El Yunque, and the enchantment of Casa Flamboyant firsthand.

For Carlos, the visit carried profound emotional significance. Sharing the rainforest with his parents—particularly the lush tropical environment that resonated so deeply with memory, ancestry, migration, and Puerto Rican identity—felt like closing a circle between family history and personal artistic journey.

The visit unfolded through meals, conversations, walks through the gardens, views of waterfalls, and moments of quiet observation beneath the rainforest

canopy. Casa Flamboyant, already layered with artistic and personal associations, became further intertwined with family memory and emotional inheritance.

(MUST EXPAND THIS SECTION WITH PERSONAL MEMORIES, STORIES, PHOTOGRAPHS, AND REFLECTIONS.)

2020. Casa Flamboyant Returns to Private Ownership

Around 2020, Casa Flamboyant was sold once again and transitioned back into a private residence, bringing to a close its long chapter as one of Cubuy's most beloved boutique rainforest retreats.

Over the decades, the property had evolved from Fred Mueller's artistic sanctuary into Shirley Mooney's intimate guesthouse, later continuing under Rick and Florin's stewardship as a refined eco-retreat deeply woven into the cultural and emotional landscape of Cubuy.

Though no longer operating publicly, Casa Flamboyant remains embedded in the oral history of the rainforest community and in the memories of the many artists, travelers, musicians, collectors, architects, and friends who passed through its gardens, terraces, rivers, and storms over the years.

2020?. David Orr Acquires the Hutchinson Property

Around 2020, David Orr acquired the former rainforest residence of Siddhia and Stanley Hutchinson in Cubuy and began extensive renovations to the house, gardens, terraces, waterfalls, and semi-Olympic pool.

The property—already legendary within local oral history—continued evolving under Orr's stewardship while preserving much of its unique architectural and environmental character.

(MUST EXPAND WITH INTERVIEWS, PROPERTY HISTORY, PHOTOGRAPHS, AND DETAILS OF THE RENOVATIONS.)

2023. Jackeline and Kevin Price Acquire Land in Cubuy

In 2023, Jackeline and Kevin Price formally acquired land in Cubuy, deepening a relationship with the rainforest that had begun years earlier through visits to Casa Cubuy and friendships formed within the community.

Their growing connection to Cubuy reflects the continuing evolution of the area—not through large-scale development, but through small constellations of people drawn to the landscape's beauty, history, spirituality, and sense of refuge.

(MUST EXPAND THROUGH INTERVIEWS, STORIES, PHOTOGRAPHS, AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS.)

2024. Finca Utopia

By 2024, the land acquired by Carlos Betancourt and Alberto Latorre in Cubuy had increasingly begun evolving into what became known as *Finca Utopia*—a living extension of their artistic, ecological, and spiritual relationship with Puerto Rico's rainforest landscape.

Part sanctuary, part garden, part conceptual artwork, and part future dream, Finca Utopia emerged slowly through trails, planting, restoration, conversations, meals, gatherings, and long-term observation of the land itself.

(MUST EXPAND GREATLY HERE.)

2024. "Mini-Tons" at Sierra Palms

In 2024, while staying together at Sierra Palms, Carlos Betancourt, Alberto Latorre, Jackeline Price, and Kevin Price prepared miniature tostones using tiny plantains gathered locally.

During the cooking process, Kevin jokingly referred to them as "mini-tons"—a playful nickname that immediately stuck and quickly became part of the group's shared vocabulary and traditions.

Like many moments in Cubuy, the memory was simple yet unforgettable: cooking together surrounded by rainforest, laughter, friendship, and the intimacy of shared rituals.

2024. Carlos Garden

By 2024, portions of the land surrounding Finca Utopia had begun evolving into what friends informally started calling "Carlos Garden"—a slowly expanding tropical landscape shaped through planting, collecting, observation, and artistic intuition.

The garden reflects many of the themes long central to Betancourt's work: memory, tropical abundance, transformation, light, fragility, layering, and the dialogue between cultivated and wild nature. Carlos Garden has also inspired a wallpaper line!

(MUST EXPAND.)

2025?. The Waterfall House Hike

Around 2025, Carlos Betancourt, Alberto Latorre, Jackeline Price, Kevin Price, and David Orr undertook a hike to one of Cubuy's most mysterious and legendary properties: a house built dramatically beside—or almost directly above—a waterfall deep within the rainforest mountains.

The journey unfolded through steep terrain, rivers, old trails, and dense vegetation while stories circulated about the property's unusual history, former owners, architectural evolution, and relationship to the surrounding landscape.

The hike became another example of how Cubuy continually reveals hidden layers of memory, myth, architecture, ecology, and personal connection.

(MUST EXPAND WITH PROPERTY HISTORY, ORAL STORIES, PHOTOGRAPHS, AND DETAILS OF THE HIKE.)

Brief Footnotes

1. *Puerto Rican Light (Cueva Vientos)* was commissioned by Dia Art Foundation in collaboration with Para la Naturaleza and operated from 2015–2018 near Guayanilla and Peñuelas, Puerto Rico.
2. Dan Flavin's original *Puerto Rican Light (to Jeanie Blake)* used pink, yellow, and red fluorescent tubes inspired by comments about festive Puerto Rican colors.
3. *Procesión Migración* (2016) was organized by Klaus Biesenbach and Papo Colo as an ecological and performative procession near El Yunque rainforest.

EPILOGUE: A LIVING ARCHIVE, SOME REFLECTIONS:

What I hope this manuscript ultimately offers is not simply a chronology of events, properties, roads, or names, but a gesture of remembrance. An attempt to share my own experiences—as well as the stories, memories, and voices of others—within a community that has profoundly shaped so many lives. Cubuy is not only a place of extraordinary natural beauty; it is also a place of spiritual

resonance, reflection, creativity, healing, and mystery. Over the years, the rainforest has inspired artists, musicians, hikers, caretakers, teachers, cooks, farmers, collectors, conservationists, families, and travelers alike—not only creatively, but emotionally and spiritually. For many, the forest becomes more than landscape. It becomes teacher, refuge, witness, and companion.

This work remains unfinished by nature, because Cubuy itself is still unfolding. There are countless stories still left to gather: the memories of elders, the knowledge of farmers and herbalists, the laughter shared in kitchens and rivers, the voices of church members, guides, volunteers, schoolteachers, artists, and children who grew up beneath the constant sound of rain and coquí frogs. Many histories remain fragile—preserved only through oral tradition, fading photographs, handwritten notes, or the memory of those who still remember older trails, vanished houses, hurricanes, gardens, and ways of living now slowly disappearing.

It is my hope that this manuscript continues growing through the contributions of the community itself, becoming a living archive of Cubuy and its surrounding landscapes. Special care should continue to be given to documenting the aftermath and recovery efforts surrounding Hurricane Maria, the transformation of PR-191, the changing ecology of the rainforest, and the emotional relationship between Puerto Rican identity and life within these mountains. In many ways, Cubuy reflects a larger Puerto Rican story: resilience and fragility existing side by side, beauty surviving despite hardship, memory embedded in landscape, and community sustained through shared care.

If some of these stories resonate with others—whether they come from Puerto Rico or far beyond its shores—then perhaps this effort will have served its purpose. Because places like Cubuy remind us that history does not only live in official records or monuments. Sometimes it survives quietly in rivers, trails, gardens, ruins, recipes, photographs, friendships, and in the simple act of listening carefully to those who came before us.

(INCLUDE ADDITIONAL INTERVIEWS, FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS, MAPS, ARCHIVAL MATERIALS, AND COMMUNITY STORIES THROUGHOUT.)

OTHER **NOTES FOR FUTURE DRAFTS AND ADDITIONS:**

- Add a parallel timeline of artists who lived in, worked in, or were deeply connected to Puerto Rico, integrating their presence into the existing historical timeline where relevant. Include painters, photographers, sculptors, architects, musicians, filmmakers,

performers, and writers whose work intersects with the island's cultural and environmental history.

- Review the timeline in detail with Walter Otero to identify additional key artistic, cultural, political, and historical moments that should be incorporated into the manuscript.
- Add poets and literary figures connected to Puerto Rico, El Yunque, Naguabo, memory, migration, landscape, and rainforest imagery. Include possible references to writers such as Julia de Burgos, Luis Palés Matos, and Richard Blanco, among others.
- Research and expand on the reported 1967 visit of Larry Bell to Puerto Rico, including stories that he grew flowers or maintained a garden in or near El Yunque. Verify dates, locations, and possible connections to artists or collectors on the island.
- Add timeline section documenting the transformation of Roosevelt Roads Naval Station from major U.S. military base to the present-day Ceiba airport and redevelopment zone, including its social, economic, environmental, and cultural impact on eastern Puerto Rico.
- Identify and interview "Frankie" — referenced in oral histories regarding Taíno ancestry, medicinal plants, traditional food knowledge, herbal practices, and rainforest culture. Determine full name, background, and relationship to Cubuy and El Yunque.
- Matthew mentioned that Eric's father (recently placed in assisted care) possesses extensive memories and stories regarding the construction



- According to oral histories, during Fred Mueller's years in Cubuy, some guests reportedly arrived through Roosevelt Roads Naval Station airport facilities or nearby private aviation access in Ceiba. Research whether artists, collectors, or visitors connected to the international art world used this route to reach Casa Flamboyant and the rainforest community.
- Investigate whether Casa Flamboyant functioned as a bar, social club, or informal gathering space during an earlier period before becoming a guesthouse. Matthew may have referenced this history and could help clarify dates and details.
- Add a section on the history of snails in Cubuy and El Yunque—both ecological and anecdotal—including native species, giant African snails, shells, rainfall cycles, and their presence in local memory and landscape imagery.
- Clarify whether the present-day house of Lorna and Rey originally functioned as Fred Mueller's main library or archive space, or whether that role belonged instead to what later became Casa Cubuy. Investigate the extent of Fred Mueller's land ownership in Cubuy and whether Casa Flamboyant, Casa Cubuy, and adjacent properties were once part of a larger interconnected compound.

- Add a section on artist William Oberheiser, friend of Matthew Kavanaugh, whose artwork is displayed at Casa Cubuy. Include possible interview regarding Cubuy, Casa Cubuy, and the creative atmosphere of the rainforest community. Note that he currently lives in Miami.
- Clarify the origin of the name "Casa Flamboyant." According to oral history, the house may actually have been named after a yagrumo tree rather than a flamboyán tree, though later owners interpreted the name differently.
- Research and include the Ortiz family and their relationship to Cubuy, Río Blanco, Route 191, or surrounding properties and oral histories.
- Include the story and photographs of Matthew and Marianne painting with the small decorative lights Fred Mueller reportedly acquired from an old bar or restaurant in Naguabo—lights that now hang at Casa Cubuy and continue carrying fragments of local history into the present.
- Expand on the ancient Ceiba tree near the massive "Three Pointer" rock, incorporating Carlos Betancourt's photographs and reflections. Describe the tree not only botanically, but spiritually and symbolically—as a witness to generations of memory, storms, migrations, and stories.
- Review and organize the written *escrituras* (property deeds), photographs, scanned documents, and videos currently in Carlos and Alberto's archive to help reconstruct ownership timelines and land histories in Cubuy.
- Search for or digitize the video Shirley Mooney once showed featuring postcards or imagery related to the Gillette family house in Hawaii and Fred Mueller's family history.
- Include memories of the small roadside hut near Casa Flamboyant where Carlos and Alberto often stopped to eat mofongo and local food during their early years visiting Cubuy.
- Research the family who later acquired or transformed Pica Flor into a restaurant and bed-and-breakfast operation. Include interviews and stories if possible.
- Add information about the woman associated with Pica Flor who produced organic products, preserves, herbal remedies, or homemade foods connected to local agricultural traditions.
- Describe the whimsical bamboo forest located beyond the Río Sabana Recreation Area—its sound, atmosphere, filtered light, movement in the wind, and emotional effect on visitors traveling deeper into the rainforest.
- Identify and include the Sotheby's specialist or representative who auctioned Carlos Betancourt's artwork, especially if connected to stories involving Cubuy, collectors, or Casa Flamboyant.
- Add sensory descriptions of nighttime experiences in Cubuy: fireflies floating through the forest canopy, swimming beneath waterfalls after dark, the sound of coquí frogs echoing across the mountains, mist rising from rivers, and the sensation of moving through the rainforest illuminated only by moonlight and bioluminescent insects.
- Develop expanded sections describing the flora and fauna of Cubuy and El Yunque: orchids, heliconias, bamboo groves, tree ferns, yagrumos, ceibas, mosses, giant philodendrons, coquí frogs, lizards, birds, freshwater shrimp, butterflies, snails, and migratory species—integrating ecological information with personal memory, oral history, and poetic observation.




- Add contemporary drone footage and aerial documentation by Charles, who previously helped care for Casa Flamboyant during the ownership of Rick and Florin and now serves as caretaker for the current owners. His footage could provide an important visual record of the property, surrounding rainforest, trails, waterfalls, gardens, and the changing landscape of Cubuy through recent years.
- Document and photograph the Betancourt-Latorre trail: the stone and concrete steps descending through the rainforest toward the pond and *el charco*, including the surrounding vegetation, river sounds, filtered light, and overall atmosphere of the landscape. Expand on how the trail itself became part sculpture, part garden, and part meditative passage through the forest.
- Include historical and contemporary images of El Yunque National Forest peak and references to Taíno cosmology and deities associated with the mountain and rainforest. Explore the symbolic role of El Yunque as sacred geography within Taíno belief systems.
- Include archival imagery and contextual references related to Christopher Columbus and Agüeybaná II to visually support sections discussing colonization, resistance, and the Taíno-Spanish conflicts.
- Add detailed descriptions and photographs of the vegetation and gardens surrounding Casa Flamboyant, including:

    - the loquat tree,
    - breadfruit (*panapén*) trees,
    - lipstick palm trees,
    - bromeliad collections,
    - orchid gardens,
    - tropical ferns,
    - yagrumos,

- flowering vines,
- and the layered rainforest canopy surrounding the property.

- Expand on how the gardens at Casa Flamboyant evolved across different owners—from Fred Mueller's introduction of exotic species and artistic landscaping, to Shirley Mooney's stewardship, and later additions by Rick and Florin—transforming the property into a hybrid space between cultivated tropical garden and wild rainforest ecology.

MORE RECENT INFORMATION

MODERN REVITALIZATION OF BARRIO CUBUY

Historically, the southern stretch of PR-191 suffered repeated landslides, erosion, flooding, and long periods of deterioration, limiting reliable access to the southern side of El Yunque National Forest from Naguabo. Over time, portions of the roadway were repaired, stabilized, and repaved, allowing passenger vehicles to once again reach areas such as the Río Sabana Recreation Area and nearby trail systems. Although the road remains narrow, winding, and vulnerable to weather conditions, its gradual reopening restored an important alternative entrance into the rainforest and reconnected surrounding communities with visitors, hikers, and ecotourism activity.

In recent years, the Comité Pro Desarrollo de Barrio Cubuy has collaborated with the United States Forest Service and Foundation for Puerto Rico through the Destino 191 initiative, an effort focused on sustainable tourism, cultural preservation, ecological stewardship, and community-based economic development. The project seeks to strengthen PR-191 South as a welcoming and culturally rich entrance to El Yunque while preserving the character and environmental integrity of Cubuy and Río Blanco.

Since approximately 2020, the initiative "Destino 191: El Yunque del Caribe" has promoted placemaking strategies, historical preservation, community gardens, murals, trail access, small business development, and environmental education. The project envisions Barrio Cubuy not simply as a tourist destination, but as a living community whose history, ecology, oral traditions, and culture are central to the visitor experience.

Some Community Leaders Associated with the Comité Pro Desarrollo de Cubuy, Inc.

- **William Medina** — President of the Comité Pro Desarrollo de Cubuy and one of the signatories of the 2021 co-management agreement with the U.S. Forest Service for the Río Sabana entrance area of El Yunque National Forest.
- **Mariny Vázquez** — Community leader who participated in the co-management agreement and collaborated with Foundation for Puerto Rico in the development of the Destino 191 initiative.
- **Jimmy Piña** — Community organizer and advocate associated with cleanup brigades, mural projects, historical preservation efforts, gardening initiatives at La Mina Community Center, and broader community planning surrounding PR-191 and Cubuy revitalization.

Together, William, Mariny, Jimmy, and many other residents represent a newer generation of community leadership focused on balancing preservation, sustainability, tourism, education, and economic opportunity while protecting the identity and ecological richness of Cubuy.

Miraidaliz Rosario Pagán

Miraidaliz Rosario Pagán represents another important contemporary voice connected to Cubuy and its evolving community history.

Born on August 13, 1987, she spent the first 26 years of her life in Barrio Cubuy, growing up within the rhythms of rural mountain life. Her story reflects the experiences of many jíbaro families whose lives were shaped by rainforest geography, church life, modest infrastructure, close-knit relationships, and long daily commutes between barrios.

She attended elementary and middle schools in Peña Pobre and Río Blanco before later studying in Humacao. At age thirteen, she was baptized in the Evangelical church in Cubuy and eventually became active as a Bible school teacher within the local religious community.

Her parents worked for the Puerto Rico Aqueduct Authority and the University of Puerto Rico, representing another layer of Cubuy's social history: families connected simultaneously to rural traditions and modern public institutions.

Today, Miraidaliz lives in Naguabo pueblo, though her memories and formative years remain deeply rooted in Cubuy.

CUBUY WEBSITE / PROJECT STRUCTURE IDEAS

Possible Website Sections

- **Website Name**
  - Define a name that reflects Cubuy's identity, rainforest culture, oral history, and ecological spirit.
- **Home**
  - Introduction to the project.
  - Who we are.
  - Mission and vision.
  - Community and preservation goals.
- **Announcements**
  - Community updates.
  - Events.
  - Volunteer opportunities.
  - Restoration and cultural activities.

- **History**
  - Geography and ecology.
  - Archaic and pre-Columbian history.
  - Arawak, Taíno, and Carib presence.
  - Spanish colonial period.
  - Agricultural history.
  - Development of roads and PR-191.
  - U.S. period and modernization.
  - Landslides and environmental changes.
  - Settlers, leisure homes, artists, and contemporary history.
- **Blog / Journal**
  - Open themes:
    - plants,
    - medicinal knowledge,
    - oral histories,
    - community stories,
    - art and culture,
    - tourism,
    - gardening,
    - food,
    - architecture,
    - photography,
    - environmental issues,
    - personal reflections,
    - current events.
- **Image Library**
  - Historic photographs.
  - Drone footage.
  - Family archives.
  - Videos.
  - Maps.
  - Oral history recordings.
- **Flora & Fauna**
  - Medicinal plants.
  - Orchids.
  - Bromeliads.
  - Palm trees.
  - Fruit trees.
  - Birds, frogs, butterflies, snails, and native wildlife.
  - Gardening traditions.
- **Food**
  - Traditional recipes.
  - Local restaurants.
  - Farming traditions.
  - Coffee, fruits, root vegetables, and medicinal teas.
- **Community**

    - Families.
    - Schools.
    - Churches.
    - Volunteers.
    - Oral histories.
    - Contemporary community leaders.
- **Architecture**
    - Historic houses.
    - Leisure homes.
    - Rainforest architecture.
    - Jorge Pardo house.
    - Casa Flamboyant.
    - Casa Cubuy.
    - Bridges, dams, and infrastructure.
- **Waterfalls & Rivers**
    - Charcos.
    - Río Blanco.
    - Río Sabana.
    - Icacos.
    - Trails and swimming areas.
- **Weather**
    - Rainfall.
    - Storms.
    - Hurricane history.
    - Seasonal changes.
- **Culture / Arts**
    - Artists connected to Cubuy.
    - Music, poetry, photography, and exhibitions.
    - Contemporary cultural projects.
- **Links / Resources**
    - Volunteer groups.
    - Preservation organizations.
    - Ecotourism resources.
    - Cultural institutions.
- **Contact**
- **Donations / Foundation Support**
    - Potential nonprofit or preservation support section connected to future conservation and oral history initiatives.