

THE LEGAL SYSTEM OF PUERTO RICO

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## ABSTRACT

Until 1898 Puerto Rico maintained a distinct legal system very different (in terms of such fundamental components as its civil-law rules, institutions, procedures and legal culture) from that of the United States of America. In the past 95 years, from the time the American soldiers landed in Puerto Rico, the island's legal system (and the entire society as well) incorporated, institutionalized and adapted many Anglo-American common-law features, consequently experiencing an important transformation.

The purpose of this study is to analyze and explain the changes that have occurred in the legal system of Puerto Rico, specially the reasons, nature and effects of its transformation, and its present day singular character.

The study examines in detail the different components of the legal system, (actors, processes, structures, rules, culture, extension and penetration) to identify areas, items, ideas and elements of the system changed, modified, discarded, or substituted as part of the Americanization process.

Insofar as socioeconomic factors are closely related to the legal system's operation, the study considers and examines social, historical and economic indicators that help in the analysis of the legal system as a non autonomous subsystem and part of a society.

The dissertation shows that in a period of almost ten decades Puerto Rico's legal system has moved, in terms of legal rules, from a civil-law jurisdiction to a mixed (civil law - common law) one, in which the common law prevails, and that the system has experienced a dramatic transformation in other areas, as well, (such as legal structures, processes, culture and actors), as part of a ongoing Americanization process, which is likely to continue during the years to come.

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