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Political Persecution against Puerto Rican Anti-Colonial Activists in the Twentieth Century

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[Intelligence work] does not always show in arrests . . . but it does show in a remarkable collection of facts, available for future use . . . and it shows also in the knowledge that it imparts to these persons of revolutionary design that the government is watching.

—A. Mitchel Palmer, U.S. Attorney General, 1920 Annual Report¹

We have to investigate in such a way that neither the interviewed persons nor those under investigation learn about our work. [. . .] This is so, because our investigations deal with individuals who hold pro-independence ideals and when they learn that we are investigating they argue that we are engaging in persecution and repression because of their political beliefs and, as we all know, this is prohibited by our constitution.

—Intelligence Division, Police of Puerto Rico,
from a confidential *Investigations Handbook*, discovered in 1987.²

DURING THE SUMMER of 1987, Puerto Ricans were hit by the “revelation” that the Police of Puerto Rico had been compiling secret files and lists of alleged “subversives,” and that tens of thousands of individuals of all ages and social sectors were listed. The scandal was big news in the local media and was even covered by some periodicals in the United States.³ Within weeks, the Puerto Rico Civil Rights Commission opened an investigation. As the local