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Antonio's Will

Yasmin Tirado-Chiodini

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Antonio's Will Yasmin Tirado-Chiodini
Within a historical and cultural framework spanning three countries and over one hundred years, Antonio's Will tells the story of the rise of a Puerto Rico tobacco planter and the fall of his son Antonio Pontón, the first Hispanic executed in the electric chair in the United States. In this story of sacrifice, love, tragedy and injustice, the author exposes trial errors and highlights the importance of cultural and racial tolerance, respect for constitutional protections and equal justice under the law.

SUMMARY

In 1870, fourteen-year-old Manuel Pontón Fernández migrated from Spain to Puerto Rico seeking a better life. Mentored by a nobleman, Manuel quickly adapted to a new culture infused with Spanish, African and Taíno Indian influences. He lived through hurricanes, rampant disease, and the Spanish-American War of 1898, becoming one of the top tobacco planters in the island. He married into the family of Luis Muñoz Rivera, Puerto Rico's First Delegate to the United States Congress, and a key force in the debate over U.S. citizenship for Puerto Ricans. After much sacrifice, Manuel achieved his dream: A successful business, a beautiful family, money and powerful relationships.

All the power and influence in the world could not prepare Manuel for the dreadful fate of his troubled son Antonio, who in 1911 he sent away to study at the prestigious Albany Law School in New York.

On January 7, 1916, Antonio Pontón became the first Puerto Rican and Hispanic person executed in the electric chair in the United States.

But he was wrongfully executed.

READER'S VALUE

Antonio's Will is a valuable reading for those interested in learning about Puerto Rico's history, as well as the subjects of law, justice and death penalty at the turn of the 20th Century in the United States.

Antonio's Will is the result of many years of research that began with the study of one of the author's paternal ancestors. The century-old events of Antonio's crime and his execution were not passed down to the author's family, although the event made front page and newspaper headlines in the early 1900's, both in the United States and in Puerto Rico.

The book walks the reader through the historical and cultural journey of the making of one of the most prominent Puerto Rican families at the turn of the 20th century. The reader will learn historical details about Manuel Pontón, his tobacco business, his family, as well as details about his son Antonio's life in New York, his crime, the trial injustices, his life at the Sing Sing Prison and the legal and social environment leading to Antonio Ponton's wrongful execution. The novel also brings to light the unprecedented call by the Puerto Rican people, community leaders, U.S. and Puerto Rican government officials and even prison wardens who tried to persuade New York's Governor Charles S. Whitman to commute Antonio Pontón's sentence.

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