

# Racism and “Dreams of Extermination” in Puerto Rico: U.S. Biological Warfare and the Legacy of Dr. Cornelius Rhoads

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*Who were the men and women behind the U.S. biological weapons programs during World War II? We know Imperial Japan had biological weapons, specifically bombs made of infected fleas they dropped on China and there were others who committed the same atrocities throughout history. The Japanese had madmen, but so did the Americans. What kind of madmen would be engaged in such dangerous weapons of war that can kill every man, woman and child on earth? In the U.S., one of the madmen can be traced back to the late 1920's and his name was Dr. Cornelius P. Rhoads, a Harvard medical school graduate who was a victim of pulmonary tuberculosis while working at the Peter Bent Brigham Hospital as an intern.*

Dr. Rhoads was a dedicated oncologist, pathologist and a hospital administrator who went on to teach and conduct research on disease processes at his alma mater. Then From 1929 until 1939, he worked at both the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research and shortly after, became a staff member at Rockefeller Hospital where he followed his other interests in hematology and poliomyelitis. By 1931, hematologist William B. Castle asked Dr. Rhoads to join him at the Rockefeller Anemia Commission where he worked for several months to participate in clinical research at Presbyterian Hospital in San Juan, Puerto Rico as part of the Rockefeller Foundation's "sanitary commission" team to study pernicious iron deficiency anemia. Puerto Rico had pernicious iron deficiency anemia had an affection rate of 80% that was caused primarily by parasitic hookworms which also co-existed with another problem, the 'tropical sprue' which is described as "a malabsorption disease commonly found in tropical regions."

As it is told, the story begins on November 10th, 1931, Dr. Rhoads attended a party hosted by a Puerto Rican co-worker's house in Cidra, Puerto Rico, but after leaving the party he found his car vandalized with items in his car stolen, so he went to his office apparently angered by the situation and wrote a letter to Fred W. Stewart, whom he called Ferdie, a colleague from Boston that read:



Dear Ferdie:

The more I think about the Larry Smith appointment the more disgusted I get. Have you heard any reason advanced for it? It certainly is odd that a man out with the entire Boston group, fired by Wallach, and as far as I know, absolutely devoid of any scientific reputation should be given the place. There is

something wrong somewhere with our point of view.

The situation is settled in Boston. Parker and Nye are to run the laboratory together and either Kenneth or MacMahon to be assistant; the chief to stay on. As far as I can see, the chances of my getting a job in the next ten years are absolutely nil. One is certainly not encouraged to make scientific advances, when it is a handicap rather than an aid to advancement. I can get a damn fine job here and am tempted to take it. It would be ideal except for the Porto Ricans. They are beyond doubt the dirtiest, laziest, most degenerate and thievish race of men ever inhabiting this sphere. It makes you sick to inhabit the same island with them. They are even lower than Italians. What the island needs is not public health work but a tidal wave or something to totally exterminate the population. It might then be livable. I have done my best to further the process of extermination by killing off 8 and transplanting cancer into several more. The latter has not resulted in any fatalities so far... The matter of consideration for the patients' welfare plays no role here — in fact all physicians take delight in the abuse and torture of the unfortunate subjects.

Do let me know if you hear any more news.

Sincerely, "Dusty"

By the end of December, a former lab technician by the name of Luis Baldoni resigned and later testified that he could have been in danger by exposing Dr. Rhoads. But a month later, around January 1932, Baldoni gave *Pedro Albizu Campos*, the president of the *Puerto Rican Nationalist Party* the letter written by Dr. Rhoads which angered the Nationalist leader and many Puerto Ricans. Albizu Campos sent copies of the letter to newspapers, embassies around the world, to the *League of Nations*, the *Pan American Union* and even the Vatican. Albizu Campos responded by writing his own letter stating that Dr. Rhoads was plotting to exterminate Puerto Ricans with cancer as part of American imperialism alongside U.S. installed governors in Puerto Rico who promoted labor emigration and birth control. According to author Truman R. Clark, who published '*Puerto Rico and the United States, 1917-1933*' in 1975 wrote:

The Nationalists saw the Rhoads letter as proof that the U.S. government had a "policy to exterminate our people," by keeping wages in the sugar industry so low that workers would starve, selling Puerto Ricans food "unfit for human consumption and the source of serious disease," and having its governors emphasize emigration and birth control. The United States, said the Nationalists, had all but wiped out the American Indian and the Hawaiians with tuberculosis, starvation, and vaccination shots, but they did not believe even Americans would stoop so low as to inoculate people with cancer, until Dr. Rhoads admitted his part in the fiendish plot



By 1940, rather than face justice, Dr. Rhoads was selected to be the next director of *Memorial Hospital for cancer care and research*. By 1941 he was studying the use and effects of radiation to treat leukemia. Ironically, by 1950, Albizu Campos was arrested as a political prisoner and was used as a guinea pig to test human radiation experiments which led to his death in 1965.

However, during World War II, Dr. Rhoads became a colonel in the U.S. Army and was chief of medicine in the *Chemical Weapons Division*. He later went on to establish other chemical

weapons laboratories in Utah, Maryland, and Panama participating in race-based secret experiments on African-Americans, Japanese-Americans and of course Puerto Ricans along with 60,000 U.S. soldiers who ended up with life-long aftereffects.

Dr. Rhoads went on to win the 'Legion of Merit' for combating poison gas and advancing the use of chemical warfare. The U.S. Army Medical Service published *'The Medical Department of the United States Army in World War II., Volume 9'* on the original start of their chemical weapons program leading to biological weapons:

In July 1943, a Medical Division was established in the Chemical Warfare Service at Edgewood Arsenal, Md., under Dr. Cornelius P. Rhoads of New York. He was commissioned as a colonel in the Medical Corps and served as chief of the division until April 1945. The division was responsible for conducting research connected with prevention and treatment of chemical warfare casualties, for carrying out toxicological studies related to hazards in the production of chemical warfare agents, and for liaison with the surgeon general. By the end of 1943, new Chemical Warfare Service medical laboratories had been established at Camp Detrick, Md.; Dugway Proving Ground, Utah; and Camp Sibert, Ala. The Medical Division coordinated the work of all these laboratories and maintained liaison not only with the Surgeon General's Office but also with other War Department agencies and with the Canadian and British chemical warfare research offices.

In January 1944, the Chemical Warfare Service was charged additionally with responsibility for all biological warfare defense projects. This assignment originated in October 1941, when the Secretary of War requested the National Academy of Sciences to appoint a civilian committee to review the field of biological warfare. The response was the formation of the so-called WBC (War Bureau of Consultants) Committee which included representatives of the Surgeon General's Office as liaison members

And the U.S. biological weapons program was launched with help from Dr. Rhoads who was instrumental to the U.S. Military-Industrial Complex in developing and later establishing the foundation leading to the use of biological weapons. Dr. Cornelius P. Rhoads and his legacy lives on in Puerto Rico and around the world as one of the men who helped develop and produce some of the most dangerous biological (and chemical weapons) known to man. Dr. Cornelius P. Rhoads was a brilliant doctor and researcher, but there is no doubt that he was a racist and a psychopath with dreams of exterminating the Puerto Rican population.

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Timothy Alexander Guzman writes on his blog, *Silent Crow News*, where [this article](#) was originally published. He is a frequent contributor to *Global Research*.

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