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BOOK REVIEW ESSAY

Puerto Rico in the News

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This essay reviews the following works:

The Politics of Language in Puerto Rico Revisited. By Amílcar Antonio Barreto. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2020, Pp. xii + 248. $80.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9781683401131.

Almost Citizens: Puerto Rico, the US Constitution, and Empire. By Sam Erman. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019, Pp. xv + 275. $30.99 paperback. ISBN: 9781108233866.

Colonial Migrants at the Heart of Empire: Puerto Rican Workers on U.S. Farms. By Ismael García-Colón. Oakland: University of California Press, 2020, Pp. xvii + 326. $29.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780520325791.

Early Puerto Rican Cinema and Nation Building: National Sentiments, Transnational Realities, 1897–1940. By Naida García-Crespo. Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University, 2019, Pp. ix + 226. $34.95 paperback. ISBN: 9781684481170.

Policing Life and Death: Race, Violence, and Resistance in Puerto Rico. By Marisol Lebrón. Oakland: University of California Press, 2019, Pp. xv + 301. $29.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780520300170.

Solidarity across the Americas: The Puerto Rican Nationalist Party and Anti-Imperialism. By Margaret M. Power. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2023, Pp. vii + 298. $32.95 paperback. ISBN: 9781469674056.

Puerto Rico made headlines in the mainland US in 2012 when its government, leaning more aggressively than ever into neoliberal economics, approved legislation known as Act 20 and Act 22 that incentivized wealthy US citizens to relocate their residency to Puerto Rico in exchange for a dramatic reduction in their federal income tax obligations. Whereas high-income residents of the US mainland may be taxed at the federal income rate of 39.6 percent, a residential move to Puerto Rico could potentially reduce that tax burden to a range as low as 0–4 percent.[1] In 2016, there was another surge in US media attention on Puerto Rico as its government neared bankruptcy. That year, federal legislation titled the

[1] Janet Novack, "Puerto Rico Expands Tax Haven Deal for Americans to Its Own Emigrants," *Forbes.com*, January 27, 2015, 19, https://www.forbes.com/sites/janetnovack/2015/01/27/puerto-rico-expands-tax-haven-deal-for-americans-to-its-own-emigrants/?sh=40fd512b2735.

Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act, or PROMESA (Promise), founded an oversight board known as "La Junta" to help the Puerto Rican government "achieve fiscal responsibility and access to capital markets."[2] La Junta usurped the fiscal powers of the elected representatives of US citizens who reside in Puerto Rico.[3] However, the most coverage about Puerto Rico came in 2017, when Hurricane Maria struck the archipelago. The environmental disaster generated death, illness, and dispossession from homes. In the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, media coverage followed the stories of a new generation of Puerto Ricans who migrated to the United States, many out of necessity and with regret.[4]

These three recent examples are emblematic of policies resulting from and reproducing Puerto Rico's colonial status. The 2012 legislation, inviting ultrawealthy US citizens to acquire property in Puerto Rico in order to benefit themselves, has not resulted in the aspirational trickle-down benefit for all. Rather, local residents were displaced when increased home and land values prohibited them from purchasing properties.[5] Critics of La Junta were aghast at the openly and explicitly colonial functions of the federal oversight board, which took control over local affairs. Observers noted that the federal government's response to Hurricane Maria was delayed, weak, and ineffectual compared to other recent environmental recovery efforts on the US mainland, especially in Florida and New York. These examples reflect the neoliberal capitalist logic that undergirds the colonial relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States.

Puerto Ricans in the archipelago and in the diaspora, however, have organized to put a brake on these neoliberal dreams, especially in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria. When the hurricane hit in September 2017, "Diasporicans," or those Puerto Ricans and their descendants who reside on the US mainland, immediately organized to share information about the status of loved ones on the island; to raise funds to purchase and ship generators, batteries, and food to those affected; and to open their homes to receive the influx of individuals and families who made the difficult choice to seek refuge in the United States after their homes were destroyed.[6] Meanwhile, residents of the archipelago in desperate need of food, water, housing, and medical attention quickly realized that help would not arrive from the state. Rather, Puerto Ricans turned to their neighbors and community groups, such as Casa Pueblo in Adjuntas, to access much-needed services like electricity.[7] Casa Pueblo, a longtime critic of dependence on fossil fuels, became a lifesaver for the community when it opened its doors to residents who needed its solar-powered energy. The ethics of care that has guided many Afro–Puerto Rican women's lives also emerged as a foundational resource during the hurricane's recovery effort.[8]

Two years after the hurricane, in 2019, the racist, homophobic, and classist opinions of Governor Ricardo Rosselló and his cabinet became public knowledge when the Puerto Rico Center for Investigative Journalism published an 889-page transcript of their text

[2] For the text of the act, see the website https://drive.google.com/file/d/13samB-s8eL7gbFwUVI46l8lrCl1WWj_e/view.

[3] Pedro Cabán, "PROMESA, Puerto Rico and the American Empire," *Latino Studies* 16 (2018): 161–184.

[4] María T. Padilla and Nancy Rosado, eds., *Tossed to the Wind: Stories of Hurricane Maria Survivors* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2020); Havidán Rodriguez, Marie T. Mora, and Alberto Dávila, eds., *Hurricane María in Puerto Rico: Disaster, Vulnerability & Resiliency* (New York: Lexington Books, 2021).

[5] Nicole Acevedo, "Do Puerto Rico Tax Breaks Displace Locals to Benefit the Wealthy? Here Are 5 Things to Know," *NBC.com*, September 13, 2023, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/tax-breaks-puerto-rico-wealthy-displacement-five-things-to-know-rcna104683.

[6] Rodríguez, Mora, and Dávila, *Hurricane María.*

[7] Alexis Massol González, *Casa Pueblo: A Puerto Rican Model of Self-Governance* (Amherst, MA: Lever Press, 2022).

[8] Hilda Lloréns, *Making Livable Worlds: Afro-Puerto Rican Women Building Environmental Justice* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2021).

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messages, conversations, and exchanges.[9] In response to the callousness and disregard with which Governor Rosselló and his cabinet referred to the victims of the hurricane, mass protests erupted in July 2019 that forced Rosselló to resign.[10] Although led by a younger generation of Puerto Ricans, the movement represented the frustration of all those most critical of the consequences of US colonialism. The protests themselves became a celebration of diverse Puerto Rican coalitions and identities, and especially the power of LGBTQ+ and feminist groups.

US media had a hard time making sense of the events in Puerto Rico. Reporters turned to local experts, activists, and scholars to explain basic facts about the colony of Puerto Rico and US empire to their audiences. News topics included Puerto Rico's political status, Puerto Ricans' US citizenship status, cultural nationalism, language policies, and migration and the diaspora. The topics that dominated the US news media inquiries have also been at the core of scholarly publications about Puerto Rican history and society.

On colonialism, citizenship, language, and political power

In twentieth-century Puerto Rican history, the constraints imposed by US empire are always present. Puerto Rico emerges as a key site in the study of US empire, and its history requires critical discussion of the US constitution, citizenship, national identity and language, and labor and migration. Puerto Rico became a territory of the United States in 1898 and its status underwent revisions with the 1900 Foraker Act, the 1917 Jones Act, and the 1952 Estado Libre Asociado. Since then, the territory has remained under the judicial, legislative, and executive authority of the US government. As the historian Sam Erman and the political scientist Amílcar A. Barreto have shown, though, the hegemony of US empire cannot silence the Puerto Rican social actors—including politicians, intellectuals, and lawyers—who challenged and contested the meanings of empire and colonialism for Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans.

In *Almost Citizens*, Erman argues that interpretations of the meanings of citizenship and the US Constitution varied dramatically in the United States of the late nineteenth century, which marked the transition away from the post–Civil War Reconstruction Constitution toward the new, post-1898 doctrine of non-incorporation. After the Civil War, the Reconstruction Constitution was moving the United States toward near-universal citizenship, expanded rights for residents, and eventual statehood for newly incorporated territories. However, faced with the acquisition of several new territories out west, and subsequently overseas territories in the Pacific and Caribbean, the assumption of eventual incorporation into the nation gave way to the more restrictive interpretation of non-incorporation. The doctrine of non-incorporation gave the US Congress and Supreme Court the right to restrict and limit the political rights of new lands and residents. Rather than assuming a natural path toward statehood and citizenship, they could be designated as "neither foreign nor domestic," their residents as nonindigenous people who were neither citizens nor aliens but domestic citizens who had less than full constitutional rights (2). In 1898, when the United States accumulated overseas territories in the Caribbean and Pacific—all occupied by people of indigenous, Asian, and African descent—the natural path toward citizenship was reconsidered.

[9] Luis J. Valentín Ortiz and Carla Minet, "The 889 Pages of the Telegram Chat between Rosselló Nevares and His Closest Aides," *Periodismoinvestigativo.com*, July 13, 2019, https://periodismoinvestigativo.com/2019/07/the-889-pages-of-the-telegram-chat-between-rossello-nevares-and-his-closest-aides.

[10] Bobby Allyn, "Thousands in Puerto Rico Seek to Oust Rosselló in Massive 'Ricky Renuncia' March," *NPR.org*, July 22, 2019, https://www.npr.org/2019/07/22/744093831/thousands-in-puerto-rico-seek-to-oust-rossell-in-massive-ricky-renuncia-march.

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Erman traces the arguments proposed by US federal judges, elected officials, senior government administrators, and journalists in the United States, as well as by politicians, labor organizers, and journalists in Puerto Rico. He organizes the book around the shifting strategies of the politician Federico Degetau y Gonzales, the journalist Domingo Collazo, and the labor leader Santiago Iglesias. The core conflict was that US actors began to embrace the ambiguity and flexibility of the doctrine of non-incorporation while Puerto Rican politicians and labor leaders assumed that the Reconstruction Constitution still held sway over the Congress and Supreme Court justices. Erman argues that the Insular Cases (1901–1905) confirmed, more than anything else, the willingness of US politicians and courts to embrace "ambiguity" in questions of naturalization, citizenship, and incorporation into the United States. Meanwhile, Puerto Rican politicians and labor leaders organized within the island's political parties and cultivated valuable relationships with the Puerto Rican community in New York and influential actors in Washington, DC, to promote their goal of acquiring US citizenship for all Puerto Ricans. They were forced to adjust their strategies. At times, they pursued justice through the law, expecting the Supreme Court to follow the logic of the Reconstruction Constitution, but they were deeply disappointed when the justices wavered.

Erman argues that by 1917 the new doctrine of nonincorporation had firmly replaced the Reconstruction Constitution. US presidents, Supreme Court justices, and members of Congress welcomed the opportunity to remain "ambiguous" when it came to questions of annexation and citizenship for Puerto Ricans, embracing a "productive legal ambiguity" that they applied equally to residents of other US overseas territories (144). One of the strengths of *Almost Citizens* is that it places the particularities of colonial rule and citizenship in Puerto Rico in the context of policies toward other nonwhite peoples on the US mainland and its overseas territories. US government representatives were always keenly aware of the consequences that any policy decisions on Puerto Rico might imply for colonial rule and citizenship in the Philippines, Hawaii, Guam, Cuba, and the Canal Zone; for the residents of incorporated territories in the West and Alaska; and for European immigrants. Race was central to the debates. For Erman, racism and white supremacy shaped all policy decisions and political moves regarding Puerto Rico and other members of the US empire.

The racism of the nonincorporation doctrine era, however, was not restricted to US individuals and institutions. Rather, building on Puerto Rican scholarship on race, politics, and labor, Erman details the many ways Puerto Rican leaders were also willing to embrace racial hierarchies as long as they were included with the whites at the top. Degetau and Iglesias claimed whiteness for themselves, claiming to represent the best version of Puerto Rican civilization, and insisted to US Americans that Puerto Ricans were in the main as white and civilized as them. Accepting the turn-of-the-century racial logic that located whites at the top and everyone else below them, they argued that Puerto Ricans should be located alongside white mainland US citizens in the racial hierarchy. The Puerto Rican political elites agreed that Filipinos, Cubans, Dominicans, and Hawaiians were racially "other" and that, as descendants of Blacks and Asians, they deserved to be relegated to the bottom of the racial ladder. Erman argues that Puerto Rican leaders affirmed this position every day: in their discussions and debates within their political parties; when they reached out to racial "others" on the island to form alliances, such as Black artisans and other Black and Brown workers; when they collaborated with racist and conservative US labor organizations that were anti-immigrant, anti-Chinese, and anti-Black; and when they denied that events in the Philippines might influence US American decisions over Puerto Rico.

What remains unclear is whether Puerto Rican leaders realized that their desperate and specious attempts to claim whiteness for themselves and the island residents fell on deaf ears. US Americans in power had much to say about the Black and Brown Spanish-speaking, poverty-stricken Puerto Ricans whom they wanted, more than anything else, to

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keep outside of the US polity. The best way to exclude them was by denying annexation and restricting citizenship. Indeed, in the end, *Almost Citizens* shows that power rested firmly in the hands of the US president and US Congress. When Puerto Ricans were granted US citizenship in 1917, the United States was preparing to enter World War I, and winning the allegiance of Puerto Ricans served US military and business interests in the region. Even then, citizenship rights granted to Puerto Ricans were weak and incomplete. As "almost citizens," the acquisition of US citizenship for the three Puerto Rican leaders was one of disappointment, disillusion, and accommodation.

Amílcar A. Barreto's study of language, status, and identity in late twentieth-century Puerto Rico and the United States shares some of the broader conclusions of Erman's study. In *The Politics of Language in Puerto Rico Revisited*, Barreto also closely traces how Puerto Rican politicians simultaneously worked in the two spheres of Puerto Rico and Washington, DC. Like Erman, Barreto argues that race, culture, language, and identity were never absent from US political debates over the current and future political status of Puerto Rico. Ambivalence and self-interest, rather than principle and clarity, continued to define US policy decisions on Puerto Rico into the early twenty-first century.

For Barreto, a political scientist, the politics of language in Puerto Rico offers an insightful case study of ethno-racial states, rational choice theory, and nested politics. Puerto Rico, he argues, is typical of other ethno-racial states in that its political leaders make policy decisions that prioritize defining ethnic unity and nationalism, even if, irrationally, doing so loses them electoral support and, in the end, costs them elections. Barreto provides a historical survey of language policy in Puerto Rico since the United States occupation began in 1898. Puerto Ricans in the archipelago, in spite of US Americanization policies, were and continue to be a majority Spanish-speaking people, with strong ties to Latin American culture. Only a minority of residents can claim to be fully bilingual in Spanish and English. Puerto Rican political leaders have created and nurtured various versions of cultural nationalism that align differently with the question of political status. For example, *puertorriqueñidad* was at the core of the cultural nationalism of the pro-commonwealthers (members of the Popular Democratic Party, PPD), whereas *estadidad jíbara* emerged as an alternative for the pro-statehooders (members of the Partido Nuevo Progresista, PNP).

Beyond the history of the status debates in Puerto Rico, Barreto explores the roles of the US federal government, federal language policy, and US American identity and its Anglo-Saxon-centric definition of nation, contending that language, culture, and identity are as interrelated in Puerto Rico as they are in the United States. The author argues that US congressional debates about Puerto Rico's status demonstrate that US national identity is not civic but ethnic. US politicians take every opportunity to question and doubt whether a Spanish-speaking community of people can really be incorporated as equal citizens in the United States. Spanish-first, English-only, and official bilingualism policy debates in Puerto Rico and Washington, DC, have always been closely tied to the status question, even when pro-statehooders attempted to minimize the role of Spanish in Puerto Rico as they advocated for full incorporation into the United States.

Barreto reevaluates a 1991 PPD decision to introduce a bill that would have made Spanish the official language of Puerto Rico through the logic of game theory. He argues that, although some considered this an irrational policy blunder, it was a perfectly rational choice. The PPD governor and elected representatives chose to push the language bill even though they did not have electoral support for the policy, and the issue would neither help the PPD remain in power nor win the next election. Game theory explains that PPD politicians were making a logical choice to pursue the language policy because they were playing the "long game." They hoped not to gain the immediate reward of electoral support but to cause long-term damage to their opponent's goal of statehood. PPD leadership understood that their audience was as much in Puerto Rico as it was in

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Washington, DC, and they were betting that US politicians were guided more by white supremacist ideology than civic ideals. Emphasizing the Spanish language over English and acknowledging a distinct Puerto Rican identity and culture, therefore, could only serve to further dissuade US politicians from entertaining that Puerto Rico—occupied in the main by Brown and Black Spanish-speaking residents—could ever be incorporated into the United States as a state or its citizens granted full citizenship rights. The choice to pursue the 1991 language bill may have been one of the reasons the PPD lost in the 1992 elections, but more importantly, it cemented their long-term goal of ensuring that questions of language and political status were always linked in US congressional debates. Given that white supremacist ideologies undoubtedly continued to inform and guide policy decisions in Washington, DC, they reasoned, statehood for Puerto Rico would never be taken seriously.

In support of his thesis, Barreto notes that, in fact, statehood has not arrived. Although there have been debates in the US Congress in which politicians stake positions in favor of independence or statehood and debate the results of nonbinding referenda, the US Congress has never committed to supporting a referendum that would allow Puerto Rico's residents to make the final status decision. Rather, history and contemporary events confirm that the US Congress has "passively torpedoed" the statehood option (152). What Barreto defines as "passive torpedoing," Erman might identify as exploiting "productive legal ambiguity." Both authors detail the internal debates among Puerto Rican politicians and their constituencies. Both conclude that, given the colonial and territorial status of Puerto Rico under Article 4 of the US Constitution, Puerto Rico Supreme Court Chief Justice José Trías Monge's admonition stands: the fate of "the oldest colony in the world" was never, and will never be, in the hands of island residents, despite the fact that Puerto Rican politicians continue to organize their political parties around status first and foremost.

On political and cultural nationalism

The history of Puerto Rico and its people, however, is not limited to reactions to the whims of US imperialism. Indeed, as Margaret Power argues in the 2023 *Solidarity across the Americas*, members of the Nationalist Party (NP) of Puerto Rico fully rejected that colonial-metropolitan bilateral relationship and instead heartily embraced and cultivated Latin American cultural and political alliances. Power writes against the stereotype that members of the Nationalist Party in the twentieth century were isolationist, insular, and xenophobic and that they pursued a masculinist project. Rather, she argues, nationalists clearly defined Puerto Rico as a Latin American nation first and identified as their allies other progressive, anti-imperialist, and revolutionary Americans in the hemisphere. Power's archival work and interviews document the transnational networks of solidarity that supported Puerto Rican independence, the Nationalist Party, and Puerto Rican political prisoners in the first half of the twentieth century. The internationalist connections they cultivated were typical of "other national liberation movements in the Caribbean, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia that were fighting, on multiple levels and in a variety of ways, for their independence" (9).

Power's contribution to the scholarship on Pedro Albizu Campos focuses on his international tours. She follows Albizu Campos's visits to other Latin American countries, his attendance at national conferences throughout the region, and the correspondence and fundraising he carried out in Latin America against US imperialism in Puerto Rico. In addition to Albizu Campos, Power documents the international solidarity work carried out by other Nationalist Party spokespersons and emissaries in the Americas, including Juan Juarbe, Laura Meneses, and Carlos Padilla. NP leaders aggressively and successfully cultivated links with Latin American allies, traveling throughout the continent,

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establishing personal and political relationships with like-minded anti-imperialists, workers, political leaders, youth, and congresses. Latin American allies steadfastly and vocally supported Puerto Rico's independence, although some national leaders wavered as the Cold War era began.

In addition to the focus on transnational, hemispheric relationships, the "book challenges the idea that nationalism and nationalist movements are fundamentally masculine projects" (12). Power explores the anticolonial work of Puerto Rican nationalist and US American pacifist women, including Laura Meneses, Blanca Canales, Lolita Lebrón, and, in the United States, Ruth Reynolds and Thelma Mielke. Finally, Power highlights the history of repression against NP members by the US government, including the FBI and the Insular Police from the 1930s on. The US colonial government routinely violated nationalists' basic rights to free association and habeas corpus. The Puerto Rican colonial government worked alongside the US government to repress NP members when it enthusiastically supported the 1948 Gag Law and collaborated with US intelligence officers in the gathering of names, meetings, and surveillance. The result was that thousands of nationalists lost their jobs and political prisoners served decades in US prisons. Throughout the period, pacifist organizations in New York City and Latin American nationalists supported an international movement for the release of Puerto Rican political prisoners.

The ideology and practices of the political nationalists that Power examines offer a stark contrast to the twentieth-century Puerto Rican politicians in Erman's and Barreto's works, whose priority had been to incorporate Puerto Ricans into the US polity as citizens with full rights. Nationalist Party members instead fully rejected US colonialism in Puerto Rico and US imperialism throughout Latin America. At the opposite end of the political spectrum from the PPD and PNP politicians, NP members chose not to participate in elections because they did not recognize the US colonial government's legitimacy. Power emphasizes, however, that the strategies of the party over time were never static. Its roots go back to nineteenth-century Latin American traditions of independence, sovereignty, and revolutionary movements. While the early leadership of the party was relatively accommodationist, non-confrontational and racist (evident in their concerns about the rise of Afro-Puerto Rican Albizu Campos), Power argues that strategies, tactics, perspectives, and membership changed dramatically when Albizu Campos rose to leadership.

In the realm of cultural, rather than political, nationalism, Naida García-Crespo, like Power, rejects the idea that Puerto Rican nationalism was ever insular and geographically bounded. García-Crespo proposes that early Puerto Rican cinema (1897–1940) and those engaged in the industry created something that was distinctly Puerto Rican and nationalist in character. To create a cinema that claimed to be culturally nationalist, cinema industry members had to be deeply entrenched in cultural, industrial, and commercial transnational exchanges. García-Crespo demonstrates that the cinema industry was never geographically bounded and was distinctly transnational in scope. As Power argues that Puerto Rican political nationalism was hemispheric, García-Crespo proposes that early twentieth-century cultural nationalist cinema in Puerto Rico was likewise born out of transnational exchanges.

García-Crespo's *Early Puerto Rican Cinema and Nation Building* offers the most radical argument and methodology of the six books reviewed here. Early cinema is one way to examine the development and formation of a Puerto Rican cultural nationalist identity. Following the evidence, her reconstruction of that history shows that films, producers, directors, actors, studios, locations, technologies, distribution companies, and audiences were always transnational. Early Puerto Rican cinema reproduced Hollywood-style plots, incorporated storylines with racist and sexualized orientalist tropes, and embraced the image of Spain as the culturally superior origin of Puerto Rican and Latin American culture. As she documents, the struggles to produce films in Puerto Rico, to cast Puerto

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Rican actors, to adapt Puerto Rican screenplays, and to work with Puerto Rican producers were never exclusively local or free from transnational influences and technologies. García-Crespo proposes, therefore, that our interpretation and analysis of those films and that history cannot be reduced to how they were related to a national identity independent of transnational factors, not least of which was commercial success. Rather, she argues that if scholars identify the film industry as a contributor to nation building and national identity, then they must also accept that national identities are fundamentally constructed out of transnational exchanges rather than born independently or organically from within a geographically bounded Puerto Rico.

Early Puerto Rican Cinema and Nation Building also offers an expansive methodology. The study of early Puerto Rican cinema proved challenging for García-Crespo because many early films were not preserved or did not survive heat and humidity. Instead, the author turns to "the great amount of peripheral materials that are present in Puerto Rican archives and with transnational resources" (2). She examines discourses about film in secondary accounts, such as newspaper articles, correspondence, business records of theater and production companies, and records of investments and innovations in technologies. In the end, García-Crespo creates an extremely detailed and intricate history of the development of the cinema industry in Puerto Rico. This selection of sources allows her to convincingly define "national cinema" as "a *transnational web* of discourses about film that shape the way self-identified nationals construct themselves and their culture" (8, emphasis in original).

On social history

The history of empire and colonialism in Puerto Rico extends beyond questions of political status and cultural identity. As Ismael García-Colón and Marisol Lebrón argue in their studies, colonialism in the twentieth century and into the early twenty-first has shaped the history of labor and the sense of security and safety of poor and working-class residents of *residenciales* (low-income, public housing).

The anthropologist García-Colón enters the discussion through a focus on Puerto Rican migrant workers in the US agriculture industry. As soon as Puerto Rico was occupied by the United States in 1898, regardless of its territorial status or their citizenship, Puerto Rican workers became inserted into the US labor force. García-Colón "focuses on the formation of Puerto Rican farmworkers with the complex fields of power in which US colonialism made it possible to harness their labor" (8). Before 1917, residents of Puerto Rico were considered US nationals who could be transported to the other side of the US empire in the Pacific, above all as sugarcane workers in Hawaii. Once they became US citizens, Puerto Ricans could be contracted to work as seasonal laborers on farms on the US mainland, following the model established by the Bracero Program. García-Colón focuses on how US citizenship and labor rights made Puerto Rican labor less desirable to US farmers, who preferred more submissive, cheaper, and deportable immigrant labor with fewer rights, and on how the PPD government, in particular, facilitated the migration of agricultural workers to the metropole. García-Colón makes the critical argument that Puerto Rican scholars must keep migration and agricultural labor front and center in their discussions of twentieth-century colonialism and state formation in Puerto Rico.

The book's first half details the formation of the infrastructure that allowed for the creation of Puerto Rican migrant agricultural labor. The rise of the PPD and its platform of social mobility allowed bureaucrats to create an infrastructure that could promote and (attempt to) manage the movement of seasonal labor from Puerto Rico to the northeastern United States. Labor administrators created contracts that tried to regulate the wages and working conditions of Puerto Rican workers, which required the support of US farmers and

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reflected changing federal regulations for farm labor, including immigrant seasonal workers. The Puerto Rican government was unable to manage all seasonal labor migration to the United States. The seasonal nature of agricultural jobs in Puerto Rico, the lack of state investment in diversifying agriculture, high unemployment rates, and a dearth of other viable options for potential migrants meant that the supply of labor was always abundant, even as the public and the state were keenly aware of the substandard working and living conditions that most workers experienced on the mainland. The PPD government created the infrastructure and cultivated the relationships with US farmers—not always positive—that facilitated the migration of Puerto Rican seasonal farm labor throughout the twentieth century, but especially since the 1940s.

The second half of *Colonial Migrants at the Heart of Empire* explores what it meant to be a Puerto Rican migrant worker in the United States through a discussion of working and housing conditions, wages, and relationships with other workers inside the labor camp and with racist community members outside it. The interviews García-Colón conducted with seasonal workers capture their experiences of labor camps as prisons, as living and working conditions in camps were controlling and punitive. Workers tried to overcome their oppression by reaching out to labor allies in the States or to Puerto Rico government representatives. In the 1970s, the US agriculture industry underwent changes. Farms became more capital-intensive, farmland was consolidated, farmers became less dependent on seasonal labor, and they preferred to employ deportable immigrants rather than US citizens. These changes made employment for Puerto Rican seasonal workers scarcer. Nevertheless, Puerto Rican workers had developed a tradition of seasonal migration to US farms and organized to protect whatever rights they could assert to improve their working and living conditions. Workers were supported by a range of allies, including not-for-profit organizations, religious groups, and labor unions. These groups attempted to represent workers' interests, tried to organize labor, provided worker education initiatives, offered basic health care services, and, when necessary, brought legal challenges against US farmers and the Puerto Rican government for violating federal legislation intended to secure basic working and housing standards.

García-Colón's ethnography shows, through a meticulous and comprehensive discussion of farm labor in the United States, how Puerto Rican experiences, history, and identities were never geographically bounded. Workers' history documents how colonialism and migration shaped all, including the workers and family members in Puerto Rico who benefited from higher incomes yet suffered separation and prolonged absences. Movement and migration, shaped by colonialism and US citizenship, were at the core of Puerto Rican migrants' farm labor experience.

Like the other authors reviewed here, Lebrón's study of punitive governance in Puerto Rico since the 1990s discusses the politics and economics of US colonialism and the use of Puerto Rico as a US showcase for the Americas. However, at the heart of *Policing Life and Death* is a focus on the local actors who promoted, justified, and carried out punitive governance against Black and Brown working-class and poor Puerto Ricans. Lebrón also incorporates the experiences of those who became victims of policing in Puerto Rico, as well as those who embraced and championed alternatives to punitive governance through generative community-based practices.

Policing Life and Death is a study of the Puerto Rican government policy of *mano dura contra el crimen*, or "iron first against crime," a measure that responded to the 1990s drug-trafficking crisis in Puerto Rico. The new policy allowed the deployment of police and military forces into public housing (*residenciales*) and other places such as shopping malls. While aggressive policing against the poor in majority Black and Brown spaces was intended to fight drug trafficking and violent crime, it instead generated greater violence against the poor and youth in general and contributed to a higher tolerance for racism, classism, police violence, and violent death.

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Lebrón traces the rise in punitive governance in Puerto Rico and argues that it was and remains deeply linked to the limits of colonial economic development. The mid-twentieth-century economic policy known as Operation Bootstrap focused government resources and attention on industrialization. Private industry, however, even with the support of friendly government policies, was never able to create enough urban or industrial sector jobs to satisfy labor demand. As a result, some workers pursued migration as a source of employment (as seen in García-Colón's study). By the 1990s, the stalled economy reached a crisis point when the US Congress abolished Section 936, a policy that encouraged foreign investment in Puerto Rico. At the same time, Puerto Rico's geographic location and colonial status as a territory of the United States contributed to the growth of an underground economy that since the 1970s responded to the US consumption of and demand for illicit drugs from South America. In the 1990s, the underground economy was one of the few sectors that allowed youth and families living in poverty to earn some cash and support their relatives. The state responded to increases in violent crime, which they linked to drug trafficking, by granting the police more power and authority over the poor and youth, especially through the police and military occupation of their *residenciales*.

Lebrón argues that the government policy of *mano dura* and its later incarnations were misguided and ineffective. Police and military occupations of housing projects dispersed, rather than curtailed, the drug trade. During occupations, police acted with impunity toward residents of low-income housing, increasing fear and distrust. The state justification for police presence and violence did the ideological work of promoting an acceptance of violent death as the consequence of drug trafficking. Middle-class families and the elite, in turn, were complicit in their acceptance that police action was necessary to keep them safe. However, when police violence extended beyond poor and black spaces, it was met with resistance. For example, cultural producers of underground music, later known as reggaeton, as well as the youth who embraced the music, hairstyles, dress, and behavior of *reggaetoneros* were assumed to be criminals and treated accordingly. University students who protested austerity measures in the 1990s were treated no differently than any other presumed criminals in Puerto Rico, which generated great alarm among middle-class families and parents. The police culture of violence, sexism, and patriarchy was also evident when the suffering of "imperfect victims" of crime in Puerto Rico (individuals who violated conservative gender norms) was dismissed and belittled by police authorities and cultural icons, including the controversial and "canceled" TV personality La Comay.

While Lebrón meticulously details the emergence of the punitive state in Puerto Rico, she also tells the story of how communities resisted the violence directed against them. In the second half of the book, Lebrón examines the ways university students rejected the state's racist and classist attempts to pit them against poor Black youth from Loíza, how women and LGBTQ+ activists and community members rejected old and tired patriarchal arguments that sought to justify unacceptable gendered violence, and the ways Black feminist women in the town of Loíza embraced alternatives to punitive policing in their community. A Loíza Black women's group (Taller Salud's Acuerdo de Paz) worked in the community to support Black boys and youth. Their community building and engagement demonstrated that police arguments about youth, violent crime, and drug trafficking, which had been used to support the *mano dura* policies, were simply wrong. Instead, in Loíza, when Black youth battled one another, they did so to demand respect and enforce territoriality, ways to assert their humanity against other Puerto Ricans who were deeply racist and daily diminished their sense of value through racist practices.

We began this essay with examples of why Puerto Rico made headlines in the US media in the past decade, including Puerto Rico's political leadership cultivating US billionaires (Act 20 and Act 22), extreme versions of US colonial governance (La Junta), and environmental havoc. Each of these news topics also speaks to community organizing and rebuilding efforts after Hurricane Maria, mass protests against political corruption,

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and the emergence of a new generation of anticolonial activists who have proven to be more inclusive than others in the past, including a coalition of feminists, Afro-Puerto Ricans, LGBTQ+ activists, and anticolonial young people. As these readings attest, these contemporary crises are deeply rooted in twentieth-century Puerto Rican history. The readings reviewed here help us make sense of the legacies of US empire and colonialism in Puerto Rico; the investment of the Puerto Rican political elite class in the reproduction of US colonialism; the bottom-up organizing that is required to challenge patriarchal, racist, and gender domination; and the ways racial ideologies and formation inform all these topics.

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