

NEW CURRENTS IN
PUERTO RICAN HISTORY:
Legacy, Continuity, and Challenges
of the "Nueva Historia"*

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- TRADICION DE FUTURO: EL PRIMER SIGLO DEL BANCO POPULAR DE PUERTO RICO (1893–1993). By Guillermo A. Baralt. (San Juan: Banco Popular de Puerto Rico, 1993. Pp. 372. \$45.00 cloth, \$35.00 paper.)
- CONTRA LA CORRIENTE: SEIS MICROBIOGRAFIAS DE LOS TIEMPOS DE ESPAÑA. By Fernando Picó. (Río Piedras: Huracán, 1995. Pp. 189. \$11.95 paper.)
- EL DIA MENOS PENSADO: HISTORIA DE LOS PRESIDARIOS EN PUERTO RICO (1793–1993). By Fernando Picó. (Río Piedras: Huracán, 1994. Pp. 198. \$11.95 paper.)
- MY MUSIC IS MY FLAG: PUERTO RICAN MUSICIANS AND THEIR NEW YORK COMMUNITIES, 1917–1940. By Ruth Glasser. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994. Pp. 253. \$30.00 cloth.)
- CONTROL SOCIAL Y ACTITUDES POLITICAS EN PUERTO RICO (1823–1837). By Jesús Raúl Navarro García. (Seville: Diputación Provincial de Sevilla, 1991. Pp. 473. \$29.00 paper.)

The 1970s and 1980s proved to be remarkably prolific decades for the historiography of Puerto Rico. Monographs and essays on the island's history proliferated, and a fundamental shift took place in methodology, theoretical perspectives, and subject matter. The works produced during this period have traditionally been referred to as "la nueva historia."¹

*The author wishes to thank Liliana Arabia, Emilio Kourí, Juan J. Baldrich, Pedro San Miguel, Jorge Duany, and the anonymous *LARR* reviewers for their constructive suggestions.

1. For critiques of the "new history," see James Dietz, "Puerto Rico's New History," *LARR* 19, no. 1 (1984):210–22; Mariano Negrón Portillo and Raúl Mayo Santana, "Trabajo, producción y conflictos en el siglo XIX: Una revisión crítica de las nuevas investigaciones históricas en Puerto Rico," *Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 24, nos. 3–4 (1985):469–96; María de los Angeles Castro, "De Salvador Brau hasta la 'novísima' historia: Un replanteamiento y una crítica," *Op. Cit.* 4 (1988–1989):9–56 (published in Río Piedras); Gervasio L. García, *Historia crítica, historia sin coartadas: Algunos problemas de la historia de Puerto Rico* (Río Piedras: Huracán,

This body of literature largely rejected the foundational paradigms of Puerto Rico's first generation of professional historians. Usually identified as "la Generación del '40," this earlier group viewed history from a positivist perspective and shared a Hispanophile bias. The hallmarks of this generation were the study of nineteenth-century political, institutional, and legal history; emphasis on official government documents and newspapers as reliable objective sources; the tendency to focus on individuals, particularly those associated with the development of local political parties; and reliance on the humanities for methodological perspectives.² Given the magnitude of local and world changes throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the "new historians" found it unacceptable to analyze Puerto Rican history through the lens of the Generación del '40. The younger generation introduced several innovations: a concern with documenting the life of oppressed and marginalized peoples in Puerto Rico; reliance on economics and material conditions as central explanatory phenomena and on the social sciences for theoretical and methodological insights; exploration of new and often untapped sources for research; and a desire to make the results of historical research available to audiences outside the academic community.

The 1990s in turn have witnessed Puerto Rican scholars' struggle with the challenges from postmodernist theoretical approaches.³ The lack of discernible or desirable historical paradigms has left Puerto Rican historians gravitating toward three large but not entirely cohesive clusters. The first consists of those works that have continued the legacy of the "new history" while moving into additional thematic areas, such as women's history and political history. Many of the works in this category have also incorporated criticisms made of the new history, such as claims of neglecting the importance of the state, abandoning institutional history, and making assertions about the island based on narrowly localized case studies. The second cluster of works, those associated with various postmodern approaches, have collectively built a case for revising historical work on the island by employing theoretical and methodological postulations emerging from literary and cultural studies.⁴ Favorite topics

1983); Arcadio Díaz-Quinones, *La memoria rota* (Río Piedras: Huracán, 1993); and Arturo Torrecilla, *El espectro posmoderno: Ecología, neoproletariado, intelligentsia* (San Juan: Publicaciones Puertorriqueñas, 1995), 83–138.

2. Castro, "De Salvador Brau," 22–32.

3. See Torrecilla, *El espectro posmoderno*, 149–217. For a comparative perspective on how postmodernism has affected historical writing in the United States, see Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York: Norton, 1994), 198–309.

4. See for example Carlos Pabón, "El lenguaje de la diferencia y la nación imaginada," *Op. Cit.* 8 (1994):7–10; Silvia Alvarez Curbelo, "Coartadas para la agresión: Emigración, guerra y populismo," in *Polifonía salvaje: Ensayos de cultura y política en la postmodernidad*, edited by Irma Rivera Nieves and Carlos Gil (San Juan: Postdata, 1995), 91–107; and Gladys Jiménez, "'Xiomara mi hermana': Diplo y el travestismo racial en Puerto Rico de los años 50," *Bordes* 2 (1995):15–27.

for these historians have included the critique of nationalism, the connections between identity and Puerto Rican migration, the populist politics of the Partido Popular Democrático in the 1940s and 1950s, and the relevance of popular culture. The third cluster includes works by those historians who continue to write within the traditional paradigms of the *Generación del '40*.⁵ Inevitably, the three clusters overlap at times.

In this review essay, I will concentrate on recent works that have continued the tradition of the *nueva historia* and thus fall within the first cluster. These books were selected to include work by authors who have been core members of the new history, such as Fernando Picó and Guillermo Baralt, in order to observe how their scholarship has changed since the 1970s. The remaining two works under review, by Jesús Raúl Navarro García and by Ruth Glasser, have emerged out of the conceptual and methodological agenda provided by the *nueva historia*. But they also reflect a shift into thematic areas untapped by the new historians, such as nineteenth-century political history and the history of the Puerto Rican diaspora. Taken as a whole, the five books reviewed here show how the *nueva historia*, while maintaining its core characteristics, has been transformed to meet the claims of its critics and to reflect the professional maturing of its founding members.

The writer most closely associated with the *nueva historia* has been Fernando Picó, Puerto Rico's most prolific and influential historian. His early works *Libertad y servidumbre* (1979) and *Amargo café* (1981) epitomize attempts to recapture the socioeconomic fabric of daily life, in this case, in the mountainous coffee-producing municipality of Utuado.⁶ Since those works were published, Picó has written monographs on such diverse topics as the 1981–1982 strike at the University of Puerto Rico, a general history of Puerto Rico, the history of a rural barrio near the San Juan metropolitan area, and the aftermath of the U.S. invasion and occupation of Puerto Rico in 1898.⁷ Diverse as these topics might seem, Picó has always been preoccupied with including marginalized groups and individuals as agents in the discovery of counterhegemonic perspectives

5. Examples of this scholarship include Luis M. Díaz Soler, *Puerto Rico desde sus orígenes hasta el cese de la dominación española* (Río Piedras: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1994); Irene Fernández Aponte, *El cambio de soberanía en Puerto Rico* (Madrid: Mapfre, 1992); Gonzalo F. Córdova, *Luis Sánchez Morales, servidor ejemplar* (San Juan: Editorial Académica para la Obra de José Celso Barboas y Alcalá, 1991); and Gonzalo F. Córdova, *Resident Commissioner Santiago Iglesias and His Times* (Río Piedras: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1993).

6. See Picó, *Libertad y servidumbre en el Puerto Rico del siglo XIX* (Río Piedras: Huracán, 1979); and *Amargo café: Los pequeños y medianos caficultores de Utuado en la segunda mitad del siglo XIX* (Río Piedras: Huracán, 1981).

7. See *Las vallas rotas* (Río Piedras: Huracán, 1982), which Picó coauthored with Milton Pabón and Roberto Alejandro; *Historia general de Puerto Rico* (Río Piedras: Huracán, 1986); *Vivir en Caimito* (Río Piedras: Huracán, 1988); and *1898: La guerra después de la guerra* (Río Piedras: Huracán, 1987).

in the history of Puerto Rico.⁸ Another central element has been his innovative use of historical sources from parish, municipal, national, and foreign archives and the employment of methodological perspectives often taken from French historiography.

Picó's most recent book, *Contra la corriente: Seis microbiografías de los tiempos de España*, represents a response to the paradigmatic crisis currently affecting Puerto Rican historians. It also validates the potential of some aspects of the new history's partially fulfilled agenda. In the preface, Picó briefly outlines the current status of Puerto Rican historiography and worries that the effervescence of the historical production of the 1970s and 1980s has waned due to the surging of a postmodern challenge (pp. 20–29). Picó asserts that postmodern criticism has enhanced and can further expand historical inquiry in Puerto Rico by emphasizing the role of small and fringe communities, examining dissident movements, and unearthing cultural practices considered lost or unimportant. But he also argues for a revitalization of the historical research and writing in Puerto Rico emerging from the original mission of the *nueva historia*. He is encouraged by ventures into areas such as women's history, political and cultural history, and sixteenth- and seventeenth-century colonial history. Picó believes that these advances are part of the unfulfilled agenda of the new history. Even if the new historians themselves did not address these areas in their works, they acknowledged the need to move into such areas and laid conceptual and methodological groundwork that facilitated research on those topics.

Although Picó has not shied away from theoretical debates in his career, he has often preferred to use published monographs as his contribution to what he views as important debates about Puerto Rican historiography.⁹ *Contra la corriente* unequivocally follows that tendency. This collection of six micro-biographies is intended "to react, via specific works rather than via a theoretical discussion, to the challenge posed by postmodern debates within our academic community" (p. 20). Picó defines these micro-biographies as brief sketches of ordinary people who were not historical protagonists but whose everyday lives placed them at important historical junctures in their generation (p. 19). These short life stories are not meant to be exemplary or even typical. Each one provides a fresh and often-overlooked perspective that serves as a historical tool

8. One of Picó's latest collections of essays is appropriately titled "On the Fringes of Power." See *Al filo del poder: Subalternos y dominantes en Puerto Rico, 1739–1910* (Río Piedras: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1993). The book's introduction provides a brief but valuable chronological account of Picó's research interests and publications. It also mentions his interest in French historical methodology.

9. Picó's work has often been criticized for its lack of theoretical perspective. For one critique, see Negrón Portillo and Mayo Santana, "Trabajo, producción y conflictos," 485–87. But see Picó's thoughtful comments as a participant in the panel "La novela y la historia en el Caribe," *Cupey* 7 (1990):79–104.

for improving comprehension of past events. The historical subjects of *Contra la corriente* are slaves from the town of Utuado; a landowner from the town of Camuy accused of participating in a skirmish with the police in 1873; the first Jesuit priest born in Puerto Rico; a turn-of-the-century coffee *hacendado* facing declining socioeconomic fortunes; an early-twentieth-century journalist; and a social bandit who confronted and then collaborated with U.S. occupying forces after the invasion in 1898. These individuals witnessed many of the defining moments in Puerto Rican history, such as the start of the forced-labor system of *jornaleros* in the mid-nineteenth century, the abolition of slavery, the comatose state of Spanish colonialism at the end of the nineteenth century, and the U.S. occupation of Puerto Rico starting in 1898. Picó uses most of these micro-biographies to inspire alternate readings to the traditional historical interpretations of these key moments. These small biographies thus open big windows for reconsidering much of the common wisdom on Puerto Rican history from the 1800s to the 1920s.

In *Contra la corriente*, Picó undertakes several important tasks in the rethinking of current Puerto Rican historical practice. First, he offers a brief glimpse of how the postmodern challenge has affected Puerto Rican historiography. Although he acknowledges contributions coming out of postmodern methodologies and theories, he remains ultimately skeptical of their capacity to produce transformative history. Second, Picó introduces a new genre, the micro-biography, as a potential route for historians through the intricacies of Puerto Rican history. In advocating micro-biographies, Picó reveals his continuing mistrust of the traditional biographies produced by the Generación del '40. Finally, Picó's recent work is loaded with hints, provocations, challenges, and questions regarding future projects that he hopes will serve as points of departure for other historians. This may be the book's greatest asset as well as its biggest disappointment. If Picó is at the top of his game in suggesting the need for alternate methodologies, sources, and paradigms, *Contra la corriente* falls short as a "concrete example" of what those alternate genres and sources might be and what can be accomplished with them. Many of its essays leave the reader begging the author to follow through on profound or brilliant insights.

Prior to *Contra la corriente*, Picó published *El día menos pensado: Historia de los presidiarios en Puerto Rico (1793–1993)*. In it he continues to write history "from the bottom up" by documenting the experiences of Puerto Rican prison inmates of the last two centuries. Picó acknowledges in the preface his adherence to the goals set out by the new historians and argues that writing the stories of marginalized sectors should be a key endeavor of historical work in Puerto Rico (pp. 14–17). Picó suggests that new methodological techniques need to be employed and that new sources must be explored in studying traditionally excluded groups. Which meth-

odological techniques need to be explored remains unclear, however. *El día menos pensado* is a result of Picó's ongoing work as coordinator of a university studies program for inmates. Among the topics discussed in the book are the changed composition of the island's penal population since the late eighteenth century; the forms of resistance and internal organization produced by inmates; the roles played by the inmates' families; the ambivalent status of prison guards over time; and the problems faced by inmates who complete their sentences and return to society.

Given that *El día menos pensado* is more of a historical essay than a monograph, the treatment of some of these themes is sketchy. Yet the book contains some fascinating material, such as Picó's discussion of alternate notions of time created by the institution, such as the "time owed" to the Administración de Corrección (pp. 53–65), and by the daily life of the inmates themselves, particularly in resisting the system (pp. 115–20). The struggle by groups with alternate visions of time and order has been a recurring motif in Picó's work, used to show varying cultural practices that are solidly grounded in the realities of those groups, even though the dominant classes have imposed their own perceptions of time and accountability on subalterns.¹⁰ Another important aspect of *El día menos pensado* is the section dedicated to the Asociación de Confinados, which was founded in the late 1970s. Its formation points to the problems inmates face and their capacity for solidarity while adapting to life in prison. Because the association has been misunderstood and mischaracterized by the local media, Picó could have provided more details about how the association originated, who were its leaders, how conflicts between the association and other groups play out inside and outside the prisons, and whether the association is a unique Puerto Rican development or has parallels in other countries. On the subject of the ways in which inmates organize to improve their living conditions, Picó could have offered more information about the women's prison in Vega Baja, which also has a tradition of inmate solidarity and empowerment.

Although Picó's commitment to historicizing the experiences of those "without history" is not new, *El día menos pensado* shows the growing frustration of some associated with the nueva historia over the lack of dissemination of their work.¹¹ Picó speaks directly in this book about his

10. On Picó's recurring interest in marginalized groups' alternate notions of time and order, see *Libertad y servidumbre*, 107–21, and *Vivir en Caimito*, 21–23.

11. The careers of some scholars associated with the nueva historia show a trend toward exploring new and alternate means of disseminating information. Picó has contributed frequently to the editorial pages of several local newspapers. He also published a readable and insightful general history of Puerto Rico for high school and college students, *Historia general de Puerto Rico*. Francisco Scarano has also written an excellent general history aimed at the same student audience entitled *Puerto Rico: Cinco siglos de historia* (Santafé de Bogotá: McGraw-Hill, 1993). Guillermo Baralt has moved away from university-centered institutes and has become the institutional historian for private entities like the Fideicomiso de

intended audiences: the inmates themselves and what might be called “the court of public opinion” (pp. 13, 49). He believes that the situation of inmates in Puerto Rico’s penal system is both a human rights and a public-policy fiasco. By problematizing how Puerto Rican society has incarcerated and punished criminals, Picó calls for rethinking the way in which present-day Puerto Rican society views and administers punishment. By documenting how the government has managed those “outside the law” in different ways and at different times, Picó shows that change can be achieved even in highly charged and contested areas like criminal justice.

Jesús Raúl Navarro García’s *Control social y actitudes políticas en Puerto Rico (1823–1837)* deals with the connections among criminality, social control, and political life in the early nineteenth century. This study focuses on the mechanisms of colonial political repression during the first half of the nineteenth century, especially under Spanish Governor Miguel de la Torre. Strategic and fiscal considerations made Puerto Rico and Cuba more valuable territories for Spain after losing its South and Central American colonies. In Puerto Rico, de la Torre started censoring books and newspapers and severely limiting dissident political expression and organization. To endure such repressive measures following periods of liberal governments in Spain was a shocking setback for some of the Puerto Rican elite and intelligentsia. Yet as Navarro García points out, the blame for all this repression should not be laid on Spanish colonial authorities alone. Navarro García also places the burden of social control and repression on the local creole elite, whose aristocratic ideology always insisted on disenfranchising blacks, mulattos, and nonwhites (pp. 334–35).

Navarro García’s *Control social y actitudes políticas en Puerto Rico* is innovative in several respects. First, the author makes a revisionist attempt to round out the history of the rule of Governor de la Torre. Because he was one of the generals in the Spanish Army defeated by Simón Bolívar in South America, de la Torre’s tenure in Puerto Rico has been associated with repression, increased slave trafficking, corruption, and political and ethnic favoritism.¹² Navarro García details much of what has traditionally been written about de la Torre. But in focusing on other institutions (such as the Catholic Church) and portraying the governor as

Conservación de Puerto Rico and the Banco Popular. Two books have resulted from these efforts, *La Buena Vista, 1833–1904* (San Juan: Fideicomiso de Conservación de Puerto Rico, 1988); and *Tradición de futuro*. Angel Quintero Rivera, although not a historian by training, has tried to make his research into labor history more accessible to a wider audience. See his joint photographic effort with Lydia Milagros González, *La otra cara de la historia: La historia de Puerto Rico desde su cara obrera*, vol. 1, 1800–1925 (Río Piedras: Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Puertorriqueña, 1984).

12. For a general discussion of Governor de la Torre’s rule, see Picó, *Historia general de Puerto Rico*, 167–74.

much more liberal than his counterpart in Cuba, Governor Miguel Tacón, Navarro García places de la Torre in a more balanced context. The study also exhibits a broader conceptualization of the scope of censorship and repression in this era. Navarro García's analysis of the traditional areas in which Spanish authorities practiced censorship—books, newspapers, journals, and public meetings—extends to education as well. The neglect experienced by the Puerto Rican educational system under Spanish rule was not merely the result of sloppy administration, lack of funds, and Catholic-oriented obscurantism but also the policy design of colonial officials worried about the revolutionary power of liberal ideas (pp. 132–65).

Another refreshing element in *Control social y actitudes políticas* is Navarro García's in-depth analysis of the economic and political interests of the Catholic Church in Puerto Rico. Ideologically and financially wounded by the liberal regimes in Spain, the Puerto Rican Catholic Church became a staunch ally of the colonial system ruling the island. The clergy's economic involvement in sugar production also led the church to support the continuation of slave labor. The nineteenth-century church in Puerto Rico wielded all its ideological, political, economic, and spiritual power to safeguard Spanish interests in Puerto Rico. Navarro García's research shows how the church employed traditionally religious exercises, like sermons and confession, to influence the faithful while encouraging the government to employ other mechanisms to achieve these same goals, such as the establishment of government-controlled and church-approved theatres (pp. 197–210).

The story of censorship told by Navarro García is incomplete nonetheless. Missing are the voices of those who suffered the censorship, repression, and social control. What were the experiences of the victims of Spanish and Creole policies? Did resistance take place, and if so, how did it play out? The closest that Navarro García comes to answering these kinds of questions is in his brief discussion of the military revolts in San Juan in the 1830s (pp. 278–90, 349–60). Nonetheless, in combining ample use of local and Spanish sources, *Control social y actitudes políticas* contributes significantly to nineteenth-century Puerto Rican history. It also provides an important basis for those studying the history and the continuation of political and intellectual censorship and persecution into twentieth-century Puerto Rico.¹³ This study should revive interest in political history that is socially grounded, an area often neglected by the new historians. Yet *Control social y actitudes políticas* follows the lead of the nueva historia in framing the issues of social control and political participation

13. See for example Ivonne Acosta, *La mordaza: Puerto Rico, 1948–1957* (Río Piedras: Edil, 1987); and Marie A. Merrill Ramírez, "The Other Side of Colonialism: Cointelpro Activities in Puerto Rico in the 1960s," Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1990.

within the larger context of economic change in Puerto Rico and the Spanish Empire. The key actor in Navarro Garcia's monograph is not Miguel de la Torre but socioeconomic forces operating in Spain and its Caribbean colonies.

Another historian associated with the new history is Guillermo Baralt, whose *Esclavos rebeldes* (1981) helped to demythologize Puerto Rican slavery by documenting repeated attempts by slaves to murder their masters, destroy plantations, and escape from bondage.¹⁴ His latest book, *Tradición de futuro: El primer siglo del Banco Popular de Puerto Rico (1893–1993)* was commissioned by the Banco Popular to celebrate its centennial in 1993. The study presents the history of the Banco Popular along with that of the Puerto Rican banking industry. In recounting the Banco Popular's history, Baralt makes an important contribution to twentieth-century economic history of the island. He shows that the swings of the Puerto Rican economy have all been intertwined with the successful ventures of Puerto Rico's leading native bank: the crises created by the aftermath of the Spanish-Cuban-American War; the rise of U.S.-owned sugar mills; the Great Depression and the effects of colonialism embedded in New Deal policies; Puerto Rico's growth into an industrial urban society; the financial crisis of the 1970s; and the current trends toward globalization. The book also presents a lengthy, if sometimes too laudatory, portrait of the Carrión family, which has been linked to the Banco Popular since 1927.

While narrating the history of the Banco Popular, Baralt successfully documents the complexities of the Puerto Rican economy since the turn of the century. Initially a small institution in San Juan, the Banco Popular survived the speculation and peso devaluation of the chaotic financial transition from Spanish to U.S. colonialism after the invasion in 1898. Baralt demonstrates how the first decades of U.S. control were difficult for most economic sectors on the island other than U.S. sugar interests. The development of Puerto Rico's twentieth-century economy, and the Banco Popular's role in it, continued with the growth and decline of the sugar economy, massive construction of affordable housing in middle-class neighborhoods from the 1940s through the 1960s, and expansion of state agencies like the Autoridad de Tierras and the Administración de Fomento Económico.

A key aspect of the bank's history in the middle of the nineteenth century was the significance of the U.S. military in shaping the growth of branches and securing federal support for bank initiatives. Baralt documents how some of the first Banco Popular branches outside San Juan followed the establishment of U.S. military bases such as Ramey Field in

14. *Esclavos rebeldes: Conspiraciones y sublevaciones de esclavos en Puerto Rico (1795–1873)* (Río Piedras: Huracán, 1981).

Aguadilla, Camp Tortuguero near Manatí, and Camp Reilly near Caguas (pp. 232–33). Lobbying by the U.S. Army brought the bank federal authorization to establish its “motorized units” (bank branches in a bus), the first of which was stationed at Fort Buchanan Army Base in Caparra in 1951 (pp. 244–45).

In a short epilogue, Baralt argues that the Banco Popular has been forced to transform its small-scale orientation in the last decade as globalization and deregulation have transformed banking in Puerto Rico (pp. 280–87). He makes only a brief reference to the injection of “936 funds” (a federally created local tax paid in lieu of U.S. taxes) into the island’s economy in the late 1970s. Given the significance of such funds to the island’s banking community, one wishes that Baralt had developed this subject more fully.

No account of the Banco Popular’s history would be complete without examining the lives of the Carrión family. From Rafael Carrión Pacheco, who became the leading stockholder in the late 1920s and steered the bank well into the 1940s, to his grandson Richard Carrión, Jr., the bank’s current president, this family’s fortunes and those of the Banco Popular have grown hand in glove.¹⁵ Baralt praises highly the leadership of Rafael Carrión, Jr., who modernized and expanded bank services, making the Banco Popular the Island’s leading bank by the 1970s (pp. 156–87). Yet most of Baralt’s discussion of the Carrión family pertains to their business and banking acumen, leaving the reader wishing for a more comprehensive portrayal of this family. What roles did they play in politics? How did such a big bank remain under the control of a single family? Who were their allies and enemies? Did family business interests lead the Carrión family to invest in other areas of the Puerto Rican economy? These and other questions are left unanswered.

Perhaps the desire for more contextualized and detailed biographical information arises from the dearth of serious biographies in contemporary Puerto Rican historical writing. Baralt is one of the few historians to include biographical sketches of elite members in his most recent studies.¹⁶ Although the new history has responded to the prevalent tradition

15. Rafael Carrión Pacheco’s economic power and influence extended beyond Puerto Rico. He was a leading stockholder of the Continental Bank and Trust Company through the 1940s. He was named to its board of directors in 1945 and continued in that capacity even after Continental merged with Chemical Bank in 1948. See Baralt, *Tradición de futuro*, 110–11, 160.

16. Baralt has woven significant biographical material on business leaders into his most recent publications. For example, see his comments on Salvador de Vives in *La Buena Vista, 1833–1904* (San Juan: Fideicomiso de Conservación de Puerto Rico, 1988). The few examples of recent full-scale or thematic biographies include Andrés Ramos Mattei, *Betances en el ciclo revolucionario antillano, 1867–1875* (San Juan: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1987); Luis Ángel Ferrao, *Pedro Albizu Campos y el nacionalismo puertorriqueño* (Río Piedras: Editorial Cultural, 1990); and the biographies by Gonzalo Córdova previously cited. It is curious that memoirs, a genre close to biography, have surged in recent decades, including those written

of uncritical and apologetic biographies of “great men” by emphasizing the social over the individualistic, broad and context-sensitive biographies (not merely biographies of elite members and political caudillos) can also enhance historical understanding and analysis.

The most significant omission in Baralt’s *Tradicción de futuro* is the absence of any analysis regarding participation by owners of the Banco Popular in local and federal politics. The book contains only a few references to Banco Popular leadership being crucial in facilitating the application of several federal laws to Puerto Rico, such as mortgage and home insurance loans from the U.S. Federal Home Administration in the late 1930s (pp. 135–37) or the bank’s role in supporting local government initiatives like the establishment of the Autoridad de Tierras in 1942 (pp. 117–19). Baralt also notes the importance of government connections enjoyed by the Carrión family in Washington, D.C., New York City, and San Juan at several critical moments in the bank’s history. Yet Baralt does not mention the political preferences, participation, funding, or influence of Carrión family members. It is naive to assume that a bank with such a large portfolio of government-guaranteed loans and so many government agencies as clients had no institutional or personal political agendas. Given Baralt’s main argument that the Banco Popular was a leading player in Puerto Rican modernization and industrialization since the 1930s (pp. 2–5), it is unfortunate that he disregarded the political implications and participation of the bank in that process. Such a focus would have made his story more compelling and complete.

The absence of any serious reference to politics in Baralt’s account raises the larger question of the author’s autonomy vis-à-vis the bank. This is an important issue for Puerto Rican historians, as corporate and private funding are becoming more central to historical research and record preservation. Baralt states in the introduction that he was given unrestricted access to Banco Popular records and that the Carrión family indicated that no subject matter was to be censored (p. 3). Perhaps some omissions and the consistently laudatory portrait of the Carrión family resulted from the author’s enthusiasm for the bank’s centennial celebration, or perhaps he believed that the topics omitted were not fundamental to the history of the Banco Popular. A way for the bank to show its commitment to sponsor objective historical work would be to make its archives accessible to other historians so that various researchers could corroborate or refute Baralt’s interpretation. Such a step would constitute an important precedent that could guide future relationships between corporate sponsors of serious historical works and the researchers they commission.

About the time that the Carrión family began to control the for-

by Emilio Díaz Valcarcel, Nilita Vientos Gastón, José Luis González, Sor Isolina Ferré, Carmen Luisa Justiniano, Rosario Ferré, and Esmeralda Santiago.

tunes of the Banco Popular, Puerto Ricans began to migrate to New York City in large numbers. Ruth Glasser's *My Music Is My Flag* describes the emergence of Puerto Rican communities and their music in New York City during the period between the two world wars. Well-known Latin entertainers such as Rafael Hernández, Manuel "Canario" Jiménez, and Bobby Capó emerge from Glasser's story, but her book also describes vividly the daily struggles (musical and otherwise) that many less-known Puerto Rican musicians faced in New York City. In her introduction, Glasser ponders the best approach for telling the stories of the Puerto Rican diaspora, urging a rethinking of terms like *ethnicity*, *folklore*, and *culture*. *My Music Is My Flag* represents an excellent attempt to combine cultural and ethnic history in context, form, and methodology, as Glasser connects the particular elements of the Puerto Rican experiences with larger debates. Some Puerto Rican migrants used music to help make a living in the city; many more used music to ease the difficulties and uncertainties of immigrant life. Yet music and musical production were not just nostalgic reincarnations of a mythical past to ameliorate the pain of immigrant life. For some, music was the primary reason for migrating in the first place because New York City was the recording capital of the world. Glasser excels in demonstrating the complexities of the Puerto Rican music world in New York, complexities that do justice to the interactive immigrant experience of the Puerto Ricans and in the process redefine terms like *ethnicity* and *nation*.

Earlier books such as Virginia Sánchez Korrol's *From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York City* (1983, revised in 1994) sought to establish that a Puerto Rican community existed in New York City prior to World War II. Glasser's concern here is to examine and analyze the concept of community.¹⁷ Sánchez Korrol already acknowledged that several "communities" of Puerto Ricans existed in the city, often comparing the Puerto Rican enclaves in El Barrio with those in Brooklyn. Glasser takes this approach one step further by showing how the history of Puerto Rican music and Puerto Ricans in general was intertwined with those of other ethnic communities—African-Americans, Italians, Jews, and other Latinos—in the city. Race relations in the interwar period divided New York City, and these schisms determined which clubs Puerto Rican musicians could play in, which musicians they could play along with, which neighborhoods they could live in, and which stores they could shop in (pp. 64–75). Glasser thus reminds readers that

17. See Virginia E. Sánchez Korrol, *From Colonia to Community: The History of Puerto Ricans in New York City*, rev. ed. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994; originally published in 1983). The most important source of information on the early-twentieth-century Puerto Rican community in New York City remains *Memoirs of Bernardo Vega: A Contribution to the History of the Puerto Rican Community in New York*, edited by César Andreu Iglesias (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984).

communities are not static, idyllic concepts but rather dynamic and fluid spaces teeming with struggles, loyalties, and contradictions.

Glasser's groundbreaking work also unveils many fascinating aspects of early Puerto Rican life in New York City. It is well known that the entry of many Puerto Rican soldiers into the U.S. Army in World War II facilitated their migration to the mainland after the war ended. Not as well-known is Glasser's discovery that many Puerto Ricans were recruited on the island to serve in the musical regiments that toured Europe during the war. Among those recruited was none other than Rafael Hernández, who had considerable experience playing in and organizing military bands in his native town of Aguadilla. Again, the militarization to which Puerto Ricans have been subject has played a decisive and complex role in the life experiences of many islanders. The multiple connections between militarization in its broadest sense and the social and cultural life of Puerto Rico and its diaspora remain a virtually unexplored area of research.¹⁸

Another important contribution made by *My Music Is My Flag* is its documenting of the way in which the recording and record industry operated within the context of Latin and ethnic music. Glasser shows how the recording industry followed the patterns of commercial relations between the United States and Latin America by extracting "natural resources" (musicians and singers), refining and processing them (in recording studios), and shipping the finished product (records) back to the countries of origin (pp. 130–32). Studios also manipulated musicians by employing them in multiple recording sessions regardless of ethnic origin or previous expertise. Musicians were often used like interchangeable parts in orchestras and *conjuntos* without much concern for the supposed purity of ethnic or national music.

Glasser's study helps illustrate several developments in the current historiography on Puerto Rico. First, historians of the Puerto Rican diaspora (and there are very few of them) have abdicated analysis of the postwar era to sociologists, political scientists, public-policy analysts, social workers, and literary critics. Historical research has focused instead on locating and explaining the roots of the Puerto Rican community in New York City prior to postwar migration in order to show that migration was facilitated by the presence of a hospitable immigrant community in the city. Second, Glasser's study falls within the framework of the *nueva historia* in that nineteenth-century immigrant communities have been popular topics for study among new historians and their students.¹⁹

18. An example of current work on the social aspects of militarization is Jorge Rodríguez Beruff, *Política militar y dominación: Puerto Rico en su contexto latinoamericano* (Río Piedras: Huracán, 1988).

19. For an excellent review of the historiography on immigrants in Puerto Rico, see María Dolores Luque de Sánchez, "Aportaciones y apropiaciones extranjeras: Los inmigrantes en las historiografía puertorriqueña," *Op. Cit.* 4 (1988–1989):57–80.

Glasser views the interaction between the island and the diaspora as part of a whole in which one facet cannot be understood without the other. Although *My Music Is My Flag* reflects other historical and scholarly currents in the United States in being aware of competing theoretical frameworks within ethnic studies, it also engages the work of Puerto Rico's new historians. This practice is seldom reciprocated by historians writing about the diaspora from the island.²⁰ Finally, the wealth of resources employed by Glasser should encourage academic and community institutions to organize initiatives to gather and preserve records in order to safeguard valuable sources for the yet-to-be written history of Puerto Rican communities in the United States. Despite some efforts in this direction (the most visible being the work by the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños at Hunter College), more attention is required to preserve the materials needed to write the future history of the Puerto Rican diaspora.

Conclusion

The five works reviewed in this essay demonstrate that current Puerto Rican historiography still shares parts of the *nueva historia's* agenda. First, interest continues in documenting the lives, experiences, and contributions of marginalized groups in Puerto Rican society. In the 1990s, however, the list of groups studied has gone beyond slaves, workers, and jornaleros to include women, inmates, outcasts, small communities, and the Puerto Rican diaspora. Books like Glasser's also show that the cohesiveness of the concept of community needs to be scrutinized and that the diversity within communities needs to be explored. Second, socioeconomic analysis remains a central tenet of historical explanation. Baralt's book is as much a history of the Banco Popular as it is a first attempt at a banking history of Puerto Rico. Navarro García connects the policies of Spanish officials and of the local elite to the swings of the plantation economy and the changing economic role played by Puerto Rico within the Spanish colonial empire in the nineteenth century. Third, historians are still trying to glean theoretical and methodological insights from the social sciences. Picó's continued reliance on the debates of the French Annales school for theoretical orientation, for example, and Baralt's modeling his book after several seminal banking history books in the United States attest to this trend.

Recent monographs in history also seem to be filling in gaps left by the new history. The tendency to focus more on the twentieth century is a welcome change from the earlier overemphasis on nineteenth-century projects. Recent publications also reveal a trend toward incorporating

20. Arcadio Díaz-Quinones has commented on how the study of the Puerto Rican diaspora was neglected by the new historians. See *La memoria rota*, 46–51.

cultural and gender analysis into traditional areas of inquiry, like slavery or the nationalist movement, or into newer areas such as musicology, censorship, and militarism. Although historians are still influenced by trends in the social sciences, recent historical writing is drawing increasingly on literary and cultural studies for methodology and theory.

Another important development is that the intellectual, educational, and editorial forces of globalization have begun to affect the Puerto Rican historical agenda. Intellectual debates in the Americas are playing a more influential role in determining the agenda of Puerto Rican history, such as the debate surrounding analysis of the transition from slave labor to “free labor.” Meanwhile, editorial conjunctures like the funding made available for books and materials dealing with the Quincentennial or the upcoming centennial of the 1898 conflict are playing a part. Graduate training programs in the United States, Mexico, and Spain also determine the topics and content of many dissertations and thus of many recent and forthcoming books. Globalization is also leading academics, particularly those based in Puerto Rico, to incorporate the history of the Puerto Rican diaspora into the island’s history as a fundamental element rather than approaching the subject as a marginal subtopic of national history.

The five works reviewed in this essay reflect several new trends in the issues and methods selected by Puerto Rican historians in the 1990s but also in the emergence of new private organizations and dissemination strategies by scholars. In the past, a review of works associated with the *nueva historia* would not have failed to mention the importance of scholarly centers such as the Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Puertorriqueña (CEREP) in San Juan and the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños in New York City as pivotal in efforts to broaden disciplinary foci and make scholarship more accessible to those outside the university community.²¹ Today scholars are still struggling with the problems of accessibility and diffusion, but they seem to be abandoning the traditional strategies used by the new historians. Picó, for example, tends to write less for a scholarly audience and more for a broad readership in the hope of achieving greater impact on public opinion and public-policy circles. Others like Baralt are working out of private institutions to produce monographs aimed at a more affluent and influential clientele. Private institutions and foundations clearly play a larger role in the publishing of historical books in Puerto Rico today than they did a few decades ago.

It is still early to predict the outcome of the challenge that evolving intellectual perspectives and a changing Puerto Rican society are present-

21. Other important institutions in the development of the *nueva historia* were journals such as *La Escalera* and *Sin Nombre* and the publishing house Ediciones Huracán, directed by Carmen Rivera Izcoa.

ing to the projects of the nueva historia. Some of its central figures remain active teachers and scholars, and their pedagogy and monographs continue to be influential and relevant. Meanwhile, a new generation of historians (like Navarro García and Glasser) has begun to complement and challenge the premises of the existing historiography on Puerto Rico while maintaining some of the core principles of the nueva historia. The biggest challenge facing the movement since the 1970s is arising from current postmodernist critiques. The works reviewed here show some of the first signs of how the “new historians” and their followers are responding to those challenges and point to the thematic, methodological, and theoretical areas that will be debated by Puerto Rican historians early in the twenty-first century.