

GENDER, ETHNICITY, AND POWER:  
Recent Studies on Puerto Rican History

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- WOMEN AND URBAN CHANGE IN SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO, 1820–1868.* By Felix V. Matos Rodríguez. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999. Pp. 180. \$49.95 cloth.)
- IMPOSING DECENCY: THE POLITICS OF SEXUALITY AND RACE IN PUERTO RICO, 1870–1920.* By Eileen J. Suárez Findlay. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1999. Pp. 316. \$54.95 cloth.)
- SHAPING THE DISCOURSE ON SPACE: CHARITY AND ITS WARD IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO.* By Teresita Martínez-Vergne. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999. Pp. 235. \$17.95 paper.)
- NOT OF PURE BLOOD: THE FREE PEOPLE OF COLOR AND RACIAL PREJUDICE IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY PUERTO RICO.* By Jay Kinsbruner. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996. Pp. 176. \$44.95 cloth, \$15.95 paper.)
- WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A MAN: REFLECTIONS ON PUERTO RICAN MASCULINITY.* By Rafael L. Ramírez. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1999. Pp. 139. \$48.00 cloth, \$17.00 paper.)
- CONSTRUCTING A COLONIAL PEOPLE: PUERTO RICO AND THE UNITED STATES, 1898–1932.* By Pedro A. Cabán. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1999. Pp. 282. \$60.00 cloth.)
- FROM BOMBA TO HIP-HOP: PUERTO RICAN CULTURE AND LATINO IDENTITY.* By Juan Flores. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000. Pp. 265. \$49.50 cloth.)
- LISTENING TO SALSA: GENDER, LATIN POPULAR MUSIC, AND PUERTO RICAN CULTURES.* By Frances R. Aparicio. (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England for Wesleyan University Press, 1998. Pp. 290. \$50.00 cloth, \$19.95 paper.)
- IDENTITY AND POWER: PUERTO RICAN POLITICS AND THE CHALLENGE OF ETHNICITY.* By José E. Cruz. (Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple University Press, 1998. Pp. 278. \$59.95 cloth.)
- THE PUERTO RICAN MOVEMENT: VOICES FROM THE DIASPORA.* Edited by Andrés Torres and José E. Velázquez. (Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple University Press, 1998. Pp. 381. \$69.95 cloth.)

The last decade of the nineteenth century brought about dramatic changes for Puerto Ricans. The twentieth century began with citizens of Puerto Rico and the United States arguing over sovereignty and citizenship. The dawn of the twenty-first century found this troubled relationship embroiled in a heated debate over use of Vieques, a tiny island off Puerto Rico's southeastern shoreline.<sup>1</sup> Like the tropical storms that prowl the Caribbean, the debate has drawn into its vortex issues of sovereignty, development, and assimilation. Meanwhile, the political tribes that roam the island have taken sides, turning the accidental death of a security guard, the U.S. Navy's notorious arrogance, and the U.S. Defense Department's routine inefficiency into their rationale for a holy crusade.<sup>2</sup> For Puerto Rico's long-suffering silent majority, the new millennium looks and feels surprisingly similar to the old one. Like the prophet of old, Puerto Ricans wonder today if there is nothing new under the sun.

Fortunately, students of Puerto Rican history and society are not bogged down in the same morass. They are launching different and original approaches to historical investigations and studying the country's history through newer analytical lenses such as gender, race, and class. This review essay will examine ten works that offer refreshing insights into a society struggling with questions of sexuality, race, class, and identity.

### *The Politics of Sex and Race*

Four of the works under review are set in nineteenth-century Puerto Rico. The nineteenth century was a momentous time in Latin America. The crumbling of colonial ties, the search for economic and political adjustment, and the ever-changing discourse over state formation led to military and social conflicts throughout the region. The fate of local elites and subaltern groups hung in the balance.

The nineteenth century was equally crucial in Puerto Rico. The 1830s and 1840s proved to be boom years for sugar producers. The year 1868 witnessed the ill-fated armed insurrection that gave birth to the island's independence movement. The curse of chattel slavery ended in 1873. Puerto Rico's liberal elites brokered an autonomous charter, "El Pacto con Sagasta," in 1898. That year, U.S. Secretary of State John Hay's "splendid little war" brought Puerto Rico under the aegis of the United States. Sandwiched in

1. The island of Vieques, to the east of the big island of Puerto Rico, has a population of 9,400. Since 1938, the U.S. Navy has been acquiring land in Vieques through expropriation. The Navy now has de facto control of 26,000 of Vieques's 33,000 acres. Located at the eastern and western sections of the island, the U.S. Navy base uses three-quarters of the island's terrain for war maneuvers and bomb storage.

2. On 19 Apr. 1999, two F-18 airplanes dropped two five-hundred-pound bombs outside their target area and killed David Sanes, a Vieques civilian, and injured four others, including a soldier.

between these events were the perennial booms and busts of an export-oriented economy and countless bouts with droughts, epidemics, labor unrest, crime, and other forgotten upheavals of daily life.

In this context, the Puerto Rican ruling elite did not remain static but acknowledged the reality of change and moved to harness the by-products by manipulating issues of race, sexuality, and labor to its own advantage. The elite acted ruthlessly to shape this newly emerging world in its own image. The struggle that ensued between the upper class and local subalterns is the story covered in four superbly researched works by Felix Matos Rodríguez, Eileen Suárez Findlay, Teresita Martínez-Vergne, and Jay Kinsbruner.

These four monographs recount stories of accommodation, resistance, and power. They chronicle how women, free blacks, and the poor found ways to counter and often nullify the dictums of the ruling class. These works also correct popular misconceptions about racial discrimination, submissive women, and strict sexual mores in showing how an earlier generation grappled with issues born of revolutionary change. These stories will undoubtedly resonate with twenty-first-century Puerto Ricans.

Over the past few years, the number of works published on Puerto Rican and Caribbean women has multiplied.<sup>3</sup> This development follows a historiographical trend that is now engulfing the field of Latin American women's history.<sup>4</sup> Félix Matos Rodríguez's *Women and Urban Change in San Juan, Puerto Rico, 1820–1868* is one of the most important studies of nineteenth-century Puerto Rican history in the last twenty years, and the only study to focus entirely on Puerto Rican women of this era.

Matos Rodríguez's goal is to explore how Puerto Rican women living in mid-nineteenth-century San Juan reacted to the economic and social changes affecting the capital city. In his account, San Juan's social elite and its colonial authorities launched a plan to turn San Juan into a "modern, respectable and progressive city" (p. 2). The plan demanded the participation of both elite and working-class women, although their actions were ex-

3. See Helen Safa, *The Myth of the Male Breadwinner: Women and Industrialization in the Caribbean* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1995); Gontran Lamberty and Cynthia García Coll, *Puerto Rican Women and Children: Issues in Health, Growth, and Development* (New York: Plenum, 1994); Altagracia Ortiz, *Puerto Rican Women and Work: Bridges in Transnational Labor* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple University Press, 1996); Jean P. Peterman, *Telling Their Stories: Puerto Rican Women and Abortion* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1996); Consuelo López-Springfield, *Daughters of Caliban: Caribbean Women in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997); and Frances Negrón-Muntaner and Ramón Grosfoguel, *Puerto Rican Jam: Essays on Culture and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

4. For works on countries outside the Caribbean region, see Susan K. Besse, *Restructuring Patriarchy: The Modernization of Gender Inequality in Brazil, 1914–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Donna J. Guy, *Sex and Danger in Buenos Aires: Prostitution, Family, and Nation in Argentina* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991); and Francesca Miller, *Latin American Women and the Search for Social Justice* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1991).

pected to remain within socially acceptable bounds. "Respectable women" could address issues of welfare, family, morality, and education, while "lower-class women" were restricted to menial jobs and the important task of giving birth to future generation of workers.

But as Matos Rodríguez ably explains, the ruling class's master plan did not turn out as expected. San Juan's elite and lower classes each carved significant chunks of social and economic space for themselves by stepping outside their prescribed roles. Furthermore, they challenged and sometimes defeated the machinery of social control instituted by civic leaders, bureaucrats, and priests. Elite and upper-class women fought for their business and financial interests. Lower-class women fought for the right to engage in small trade and domestic work. Most revealing was both groups' use of the legal system to protect and defend their and their children's rights.

Matos Rodríguez's most telling findings come out of his discussion of beneficent institutions. These entities became "tied to the elite's attempt to secure reliable domestic workers once slavery was abolished and to reshape the racial, gender and class hierarchies that slavery had guaranteed in the past" (p. 4). From this discussion, Matos Rodríguez takes a closer look at early examples of women's organizations in Puerto Rico. He demonstrates how class and racial differences contributed to the lack of a unified view on issues related to sexuality, motherhood, and family. *Women and Urban Change in San Juan* also suggests the need for further research in areas such as the use of gender-based crusades to build communities and identities, the interplay between state formation and colonialism, and nineteenth-century Caribbean urban history.

Connections between cultural and political discourses and the construction of racial and gender identities lie at the heart of *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870–1920*. For too long, Eileen Suárez Findlay contends, Puerto Rican academics have failed to recognize sexuality as an important dimension of analysis. Sexuality and its historical links with racial identities have been deemed unworthy of serious historical scrutiny. The author takes on the task of exposing the inextricable ties existing between gender and race. Suárez Findlay proceeds by undertaking a penetrating look at Puerto Rican campaigns to reform marriage, anti-prostitution crusades, and working-class attempts to forge an alternative to the Liberal consensus of the time. Using discourse analysis, Suárez Findlay demonstrates that while the language of some of the players engaged in these struggles suggested goals of negotiation and reform, their actions were at times manipulative, devious, and repressive.

The book is set in the town of Ponce, the second-largest city in Puerto Rico. At stake was the city's effort to enforce a moral and racial code that would crystallize the elite's vision of acceptable racial and sexual identities following emancipation. These efforts turned the city into a contested space where local authorities struggled to control those who did not behave ac-

ording to society's prescribed sexual and racial customs. In the pitched battles that ensued, blacks, whites, men, women, labor and civic leaders, upper- and lower-class Puerto Ricans, and finally the newly arrived U.S. authorities all vied for control.

What may be most interesting about *Imposing Decency* is Suárez Findlay's willingness to go beyond the dual proposition of resistance and accommodation. The analysis, clearly influenced by Michel Foucault's post-modernist views, accepts the fluidity of these sociopolitical and racial battles and the shifting alliances and coalitions that emerged from them. In the process, the book manages to shatter the myth of Puerto Rican racial harmony, to expose how discourse about race became a vehicle for asserting whiteness, and to explain how hegemonic definitions of concepts like honor, respectability, and proper sexual habits were in reality code words for exclusion and marginalization. The time frame of *Imposing Decency* is also significant. By straddling the last years of Spanish colonial rule and the first two decades of U.S. hegemony, Suárez Findlay opens a window into a social and cultural clash whose ramifications extended throughout twentieth-century Puerto Rico and reshaped the Puerto Rican domestic sphere in new and dramatic ways.

Terms like *aid*, *charity*, and *ward* are seldom associated with the idea of power. They probably strike the average reader as the antithesis of authority and strength. Thus it is surprising that historian Teresita Martínez-Vergne asserts that her monograph, *Shaping the Discourse on Space: Charity and Its Ward in Nineteenth-Century San Juan, Puerto Rico* is about power. She is no stranger to the many manifestations of power. Her previous work on the sugar trade in nineteenth-century Puerto Rico examined the island's first mill and located Puerto Rico's economic trajectory in the context of sugar production.<sup>5</sup> Martínez-Vergne's new book explains how a desire for economic progress fused with a newly emerging social consciousness to produce a contested discourse on space.

For students of Latin American urban history, *Shaping the Discourse on Space* tells a familiar story. In nineteenth-century San Juan, community leaders and colonial officials embarked on a campaign to clean up and beautify the city. The program's implementation fell into the hands of the Junta de Beneficencia (the Board of Charity) and the town council. Together these entities moved to sanitize the city according to their own norms of what was proper and acceptable. The board and its members regulated public discourse on topics such as family, education, hygiene, and religion. They became the sole arbiters of socially acceptable behavior. Their rulings resulted in systematic attempts to exclude from the city women and children, poor people, vagrants, and newly freed blacks. The city's cultural spaces

5. Teresita Martínez-Vergne, *Central San Vicente in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1992).

were thus reserved for those deemed financially, socially, and racially acceptable to the ruling elite.

*Shaping the Discourse on Space* tackles the familiar yet complex issue of the relationship between the underclass and the Liberal state. How could these groups be integrated into the Liberal project? How could their social needs be met and their political power neutralized? How could the Liberal state establish its program of control and domination over their lives? In some European countries and later in the newly liberated Spanish republics, the state used philanthropy and what some have called “the medico-hygienist discourse” to achieve the dual goals of social justice and preservation of the status quo.

In Puerto Rico, Martínez-Vergne argues, the Liberal state attempted to regulate lower-class behavior by embarking on a sanitation program run from the top and aimed at educating (controlling) the working poor. With the aid of the Junta de Beneficencia, the bourgeoisie strove to create the ideal social order.

Contrary to popular belief, race mattered in nineteenth-century Puerto Rico. No group in the country felt the impact of social codes and the sting of exclusion more than Puerto Ricans of African descent. The history of Afro-Puerto Ricans as a unique segment of the population has been a forgotten topic in Puerto Rican historiography. The dearth of scholarly works on race and racial prejudice in Puerto Rico is alarming. The biggest culprit in this lamentable omission is the island’s myth of racial harmony. This convenient fiction is credible only when the country’s racial climate is examined in contrast to the racial and economic segregation practiced in the United States.

Jay Kinsbruner’s *Not of Pure Blood: The Free People of Color and Racial Prejudice in Nineteenth-Century Puerto Rico* thus makes a needed addition to the scanty bibliography on Afro-Puerto Ricans. It is presented as “a study of the nature and consequences of prejudice in Puerto Rico during the nineteenth century” (p. 4). Kinsbruner argues that during this period, racial prejudice continued and yielded an Afro-Puerto Rican population that was culturally deprived and economically disadvantaged. In his opinion, the insidious effects of racial prejudice extended into twentieth-century Puerto Rico by limiting considerably opportunities for people of color.

*Not of Pure Blood* centers on Puerto Rican free people of color. They were men and women of African descent who were considered nonwhite but remained free during the island’s long era of slavery (1510–1873). This monograph begins by discussing Puerto Rican racial prejudice in historical perspective and then analyzes thoroughly key demographic data (residential patterns, marriages, births, deaths, occupations, and similar information). This demographic analysis establishes that free people of color were in fact a community disadvantaged by racism. Kinsbruner is particularly illuminating in describing the contradictions and the double talk that has

characterized Puerto Rican racial attitudes. His discussion of “shade discrimination” and the terminology used to describe, minimize, or condemn skin color is reminiscent of some of the research done on miscegenation in the United States.<sup>6</sup>

Kinsbruner extends his analysis to colonialism and its impact on race relations. He concludes that U.S. racism was manifested in two important ways on the island: it intensified the quest for whiteness among Puerto Ricans, and it discouraged Afro–Puerto Ricans from seeking and embracing their African heritage. *Not of Pure Blood* is significant because it opens a new line of inquiry into a forgotten part of the Puerto Rican population. This work reminds social historians that when it comes to race relations, there is no such thing as Puerto Rican exceptionalism.

These four works on the nineteenth century are connected by time period and subject but also by the authors’ ability to handle archival materials and other primary sources. All four authors make efficient use of personal letters, demographic sources, legal documentation, and other important materials. They rarely get ahead of their evidence and come to solid conclusions backed by judicious readings of the available sources.

### *The Blessings of Enlightened Civilization*

Puerto Rico’s political and economic transition into the twentieth century began on 25 July 1898. On that day, the U.S. Navy warship *Gloucester* entered the Guánica harbor and quickly made its presence known. The *Gloucester* targeted a lone Spanish flag flying from one of the few buildings in the dusty one-street town of Guánica in southern Puerto Rico. Within a few hours and under the cover of the *Gloucester*’s cannons, two thousand volunteers (mainly from Massachusetts and Illinois) came ashore to spearhead the invasion of Spain’s last colonial possession.<sup>7</sup>

In less than three weeks, the U.S. forces solidified their control over Puerto Rico. Two years later, the inception of the Foraker Act (1900) marked the beginning of an ambitious program to control and Americanize Puerto Rico. How the United States carried out this program of Americanization and its deleterious effects on Puerto Rican society are the leading themes in Pedro Cabán’s *Constructing a Colonial People: Puerto Rico and the United States, 1898–1932*.

This work focuses on how Americanization transformed the Puerto Rican state between 1898 and 1932. Cabán tells the story of a hegemonic project and the pitfalls of its implementation. The outline of the story is

6. See, for example, Joel Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995).

7. Richard Harding Davis, *The Cuban and Porto Rican Campaigns* (London: W. Heinemann, 1899).

familiar. The United States, buoyed by economic and technological power, achieved a successful transition from regional to global power, made war on Spain, and acquired its own colonial empire. To cement its control over Puerto Rico, federal authorities launched a program of Americanization. The U.S. War Department took the lead by initiating changes in public instruction, physical infrastructure, and the legal and judicial systems on the island.<sup>8</sup>

The U.S. bureaucracy overlaid its Americanization blueprint with the aid of the Executive Council. It played a key role in planning, executing, and enforcing these ideas. The kernel of the Americanization project was summed up by one federal officer who stated that the process consisted in part of internalizing among Puerto Ricans U.S. values such as “equality before the law, honesty, integrity, and a fair chance for all” (p. 123).

By 1914, with war looming in Europe and the U.S. experiment in colonialism encountering local resistance, the U.S. colonial authorities imposed the Jones Act. It conferred U.S. citizenship on all Puerto Ricans and stifled the growing hostility to colonial rule. But the Jones Act could not fully contain the social and economic slide. The net result of thirty years of government-sponsored Americanization was a colony in economic and social disarray. The economy was at the mercy of absentee owners. A series of political hacks masquerading as public administrators pulled the levers of power. The country’s political institutions had become paralyzed. By 1932 a complete social breakdown loomed in Puerto Rico.

*Constructing a Colonial People* represents a significant contribution to Puerto Rican scholarship. Cabán’s analysis of the process of Americanization is groundbreaking. For much too long, Americanization conjured up two distinct images: a prohibition against the Puerto Rican flag and the imposition of English in Puerto Rican schools. Cabán’s study shows in contrast that the process and its outcomes transcended a mere struggle over national symbols. Cabán argues that Puerto Rico underwent dramatic economic changes and a profound disintegration of the social organization of daily life. The island’s class structure was reconfigured within a generation, and most of the country’s productive strength was channeled into sugar production.

Americanization was aimed at more than capital formation and political control. It was intended to remake the colonial subjects in the image of the colonizer. As Suárez Findlay and Kinsbruner show, the new U.S.-dominated regime meddled in the political realm but also exercised profound influence on issues of sex and race.

8. Some changes were purely symbolic. Following the U.S. victory in the Spanish American War, the members of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), the organization of Civil War veterans of the Union Army, donated six hundred American flags for the schoolhouses of newly conquered Puerto Rico. See Stuart McConnell, *Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic, 1865–1890* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 233.



### *Constructing Masculinity*

In Puerto Rico, the study of gender and other sex-related matters has followed a familiar pattern. Emphasis has been placed on issues like sexual harassment, sex education, sex crimes, and sexual discrimination.<sup>9</sup> The issue of male sexuality, in all its manifestations, has been relegated to discussions usually centered on Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) or other sexually transmitted diseases.<sup>10</sup> Thus the arrival of Rafael Ramírez's *What It Means to Be a Man: Reflections on Puerto Rican Masculinity* is an event to be welcomed.

Originally published in Spanish as *Dime, capitán: Reflexiones sobre la masculinidad*, this work is a powerful anthropological foray into Puerto Rican masculinity. It begins with an intriguing discussion of the construction of machismo. Ramírez argues that the term was imposed on the Latino experience and that contrary to popular belief, machismo is not a lower-class phenomenon. His discussion then moves into analyzing machismo as a social construction. In this particularly useful section, Ramírez takes readers into the myriad expressions of masculinity found by ethnographic studies.

Masculine ideologies, Ramírez argues, are cultural constructions that yield unequal relationships between genders. In societies that have dominant masculine ideologies, men are constantly constructing themselves. In these cultures, masculinity is associated with three archetypes: man as a provider, man as a physically and socially large being, and man as an over-achiever. These notions do not apply to all societies. Societies such as the Tahiti and the Semai lack masculine ideologies.

The heart of *What It Means to Be a Man* is the chapter entitled "We the Boricuas." Ramírez analyzes the language used by Puerto Ricans in everyday interactions and its hidden meaning. This excursion into discourse analysis sheds light on the social construction of masculinity and reveals a

9. A cursory survey of the WorldCat database yielded seventy-five titles dealing with sexual harassment, sex education, sex education, and sex crimes in Puerto Rico. The same database produced only eight titles dealing with masculinity, most representing unpublished research (theses and dissertations).

10. The AIDS epidemic has seriously affected Puerto Rico and the Puerto Rican population in the United States. From 1981 through mid-April of 1994, almost thirteen thousand cases of AIDS were diagnosed in Puerto Rico, 58 percent of whom have died, according to the Programa de Vigilancia de SIDA. By 1991, AIDS had become the fourth-largest cause of general mortality, the largest cause of death for men between the ages of twenty-five and forty-nine, and the largest cause for women between the ages of twenty and thirty-nine. These deaths represented 31.6 percent of all deaths of men and 27.2 percent of all deaths of women in these categories according to the Oficina de Estadísticas de Salud. The figures are similar to those for Puerto Ricans living in the United States. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, in 1990 AIDS accounted for approximately 40 percent of all deaths among men and some 30 percent of deaths among women of Puerto Rican origin in the United States between the ages of twenty-five and forty-four.

complex world of sexuality, power, and subordination. Like life itself, this socially constructed masculine world is coarse, raw, funny, and sad. Ramírez also investigates homosexuals in Puerto Rico and the social and political hurdles they face. His concluding chapter offers thoughts on the construction of a new version of Puerto Rican masculinity, one that can be built only if the current balance of power is radically altered.

*What It Means to Be a Man* is bound to raise some eyebrows. Frank discussions of Puerto Rican masculinity (and sexuality in general) are rare. Ramírez's research leads to new and even more controversial questions, such as how do men and women construct their sexuality—including their femininity, homosexuality, and bisexuality—in Puerto Rico's conservative and Catholic culture? In what ways has U.S. colonialism shaped Puerto Rican attitudes toward sex in general and alternative sexual practices in particular?

### *The Newest Melting Pot*

The 1990 U.S. Census reported 6.2 million persons of Puerto Rican heritage living in the United States. Since 1952 the island of Puerto Rico has functioned as a self-governing territory of the United States pursuant to the Commonwealth Constitution authorized by the U.S. Congress. By 1970, 1.5 million Puerto Ricans were living in the United States. The community in the United States has continued to mushroom in the last few decades, reaching 3.2 million persons. All of them are now classed as Latinos. This ethnic label blurs the contours of Puerto Rican (and Latino) culture more than ever.

*From Bomba to Hip-Hop: Puerto Rican Culture and Latino Identity* is Juan Flores's attempt to define the intricacies of Puerto Rican culture. He visits such topics as popular culture, urban space, new musical forms, and "Neo-rican" literature in a carefully orchestrated attempt to stress the complex and unique space occupied by Puerto Ricans on the United States' ill-defined Latino backdrop.

*From Bomba to Hip-Hop* is divided into four unequal parts. The first offers some insights into popular culture, the concept of nation and nationalism, and the many attempts to redefine the island's colonial relations. These chapters offer useful discussions of current Puerto Rican literature and scholarship, such as Abraham Rodríguez's *The Boy without the Flag* and Arcadio Díaz-Quinónez's *La memoria rota*.

The second section is devoted to the Puerto Rican community in the United States. It exposes the unique cultural life of Puerto Ricans born in New York and the literary traditions, musical styles, and cultural movements they have developed. The essays in this section, such as "Cha-Cha with a Backbeat" and "Life off the Hyphen," offer a lively blend of literary criticism and music history. From salsa to Latin rap to Oscar Hijuelos's *The Mambo Kings*, this section is a cultural tour de force.

The concluding sections of *From Bomba to Hip-Hop* do not seem to fit with the rest of the work, however. The chapter entitled "Latino Studies" and the postscript, "None of the Above," seem to abandon the search for a Puerto Rican culture. Instead, they plunge the reader into the sterile arena of academic politics (such as the merits of Latino Studies programs) and Puerto Rico's dilemma on political status. It is clear that Flores is trying to link the growth of the Latino population in the United States with the struggle to enfranchise Latino Studies programs in U.S. universities. He claims that Latino Studies are caught in a crossfire resulting from "clashing priorities" between nonwhite students and Anglo administrators. The postscript reviews cultural and political events that marked the centennial of the U.S. invasion of Puerto Rico. *From Bomba to Hip-Hop* is slightly reminiscent of Flores's previous book, *Divided Borders: Essays on Puerto Rican Identity*.<sup>11</sup> Both books attempt to define the core elements of Puerto Rican cultural and literary experience. Flores's more recent work, however, focuses more on the fate of Puerto Rican culture in the United States.

### *Caribbean Urban Sounds*

The study of Caribbean music is popular for at least three reasons. First, music historians and ethnomusicologists maintain that the Caribbean, the southern United States, and certain regions of coastal South America form a unified musical region. Thus Caribbean musical expressions such as the Cuban *son* and the Puerto Rican *plena* have much in common with U.S. musical forms like jazz and the blues. Second, Caribbean musicians in the United States have contributed to musical development in cities like New Orleans, New York, and Miami. Finally, the boundless Internet has made it possible to tune into radio and television broadcasts worldwide. These days, the proverbial global village has a Latino-Caribbean beat.

This beat continues to attract significant scholarly attention. Ruth Glasser and Paul Austerlitz, for example, have examined a variety of musical forms such as salsa, merengue, and calypso.<sup>12</sup> Yet few scholars have taken a serious look at the meaning hidden beneath the Caribbean's most popular musical expression: salsa music. Filling this lacuna is Frances Aparicio's

11. Juan Flores, *Divided Borders: Essays on Puerto Rican Identity* (Houston, Tex.: Arte Público Press, 1993).

12. Ruth Glasser, *My Music Is My Flag: Puerto Rican Musicians and Their New York Communities, 1917–1940* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995); and Paul Austerlitz, *Merengue: Dominican Music and Dominican Identity* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple University Press, 1997). Other important works include Peter Manuel, *Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Temple University Press, 1995); Sue Steward, *Música—Salsa, Rumba, Merengue, and More: The Rhythm of Latin America* (San Francisco, Calif.: Chronicle Books, 1999); and Vernon Boggs, *Salsiology: Afro-Cuban Music and the Evolution of Salsa in New York City* (New York: Excelsior Music, 1992).

*Listening to Salsa: Gender, Latin Popular Music, and Puerto Rican Cultures.* This work analyses salsa lyrics in an attempt to explain the interplay of race, class, and gender identity among Puerto Ricans at home and abroad.

Aparicio claims that *Listening to Salsa* is “a declaration of war” against masculine-generated salsa lyrics and the misogynistic and patriarchal themes they advance. The book is not a history of salsa performers but rather “cultural studies interventions into gender, culture and music. It focuses on the gendering of music and the way music negotiates gender roles” (p. xvi). *Listening to Salsa* is divided into four sections. The first, “The Danza and the Plena: Racializing Women, Feminizing Music,” illustrates the patriarchal lyrics of two traditional forms of Puerto Rican music. The second, “The Plural Sites of Salsa,” attempts to define salsa music. The third section, “Dissonant Melodies: Singing Gender, Desire, and Conflict,” is a traditional reading of salsa lyrics as literary texts. Here Aparicio delves into the motif of “the absent women” in the boleros and concludes that this image was largely prompted by the economic upheaval of the 1930s. These disruptions led to more women in the workforce and the concomitant abandonment of the domestic sphere.

The concluding section, “Así somos, así son: Rewriting Salsa,” is the author’s brief sojourn into ethnographic work. Here *Listening to Salsa* becomes truly original. In preparing to write this section, Aparicio “listened to the listeners.” She conducted interviews with twenty-six Latinos: eight working-class women, ten female Latina college students, and eight Latinos. Her subjects answered questions about two salsa songs, “Así son” and “Cuando fuiste mujer.” The variety of responses she gathered led her to argue for the “existence of various interpretative communities within the larger world of Latino and Latina listeners” (p. 237).

### *Ethnic Politics*

Ethnicity has always been a touchy issue with Puerto Ricans. After all, they were a nationality (as opposed to a mere ethnic enclave) before the experience of migration turned them into a minority group. Even more incongruous is that many Puerto Ricans considered themselves white Europeans before moving to the United States, where bureaucratic dictums and racial attitudes turned them into nonwhites. Thus for Puerto Ricans, ethnic politics is not just a fad—it is part and parcel of everyday life.

The uses and misuses of ethnicity as a political weapon is the subject of José Cruz’s *Identity and Power: Puerto Rican Politics and the Challenge of Ethnicity*. This work focuses on the growth and development of the Puerto Rican community in Hartford, Connecticut. As the subtitle indicates, this work centers on ethnicity in the city of Hartford and the role it played in mobilizing and incorporating Puerto Ricans into the city’s political process.

Ethnicity (or ethnic awareness), Cruz argues, led to power and access to the political process. Defying conventional wisdom and some significant scholarship, Cruz argues that in the case of Puerto Ricans in Hartford, the manipulation of ethnic symbols was a positive development. In his view, this case study “showed a positive relationship between identity and power that nonetheless is not linear and cannot be taken for granted” (p. 201). In other words, this sense of otherness is the building block of identity politics, which in turn fuels mobilization and possibly incorporation into the political process. If the goals were visibility, incorporation, and community empowerment for Puerto Ricans in Hartford, then ethnicity was a useful tool. If success was to be measured by social and economic gains, then the record of ethnic politics for Hartford’s Puerto Rican population is mixed.

*Identity and Power* is important for several reasons. First, Cruz provides a solid analysis of the city of Hartford and its political development. The book chronicles the evolution of the Puerto Rican community in that city from the 1950s to 1970s and its entrance into local politics. Finally, *Identity and Power* explains the rise and demise of the Puerto Rican Political Action Committee (PAC), which played a crucial role in mobilizing the community in the 1980s. Unfortunately, it fell victim to internal squabbles, poor administrative practices, and conflicts with African American leaders over political issues.

### *The Forgotten Left*

Puerto Ricans were not immune to the radicalism of the 1960s. The war in Vietnam provided a rallying cry for those denouncing foreign intervention at the expense of badly needed social programs. These issues and the perennial question of colonialism in their homeland facilitated the birth of the so-called Puerto Rican Left. This coalition of diverse forces and their goals have not received a great deal of scholarly attention for many reasons. According to analyst Andrés Torres, this oversight can be attributed to such factors as timing (the movement peaked in the 1970s, not the 1960s), ignorance (many still believe Puerto Ricans are foreigners), numbers (only 3.2 million Puerto Ricans live in the United States), and fusion (Puerto Ricans are viewed as part of the country’s Latino population). Whatever the reasons, this omission has been partially rectified with the publication of *The Puerto Rican Movement: Voices from the Diaspora*, edited by Andrés Torres and José Velázquez.

The editors have compiled an impressive collection of essays intended to document the Puerto Rican radical movements of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States. *The Puerto Rican Movement* examines eight core groups: the Young Lords Party (YLO), the Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP), El Comité–MINP (Movimiento de Izquierda Nacional Puertorriqueño), the Puerto Rican

Student Union (PRSU), the Movimiento para Liberación Nacional (MLN), the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional (FALN), the Nationalist Party, and the Puerto Rican Independence Party.

*The Puerto Rican Movement* contains eighteen essays grouped in three broad sections, "The Core Left," "Histories and Reflections," and "Community and Solidarity." "The Core Left" offers an overview as well as essays on the Socialist Party and on radical Puerto Ricans in Connecticut. The most interesting contribution is a series of interviews with former members of groups such as El Comité–Movimiento de Izquierda Nacional Puertorriqueño, the Young Lords Party in Philadelphia, and the Puerto Rican Student Union. "Histories and Reflections" delves into the Young Lords and feminism in the Puerto Rican Left and offers assorted interviews with community activists and Elizam Escobar, who is serving time for his involvement with violent pro-independence groups. "Community and Solidarity" consists of interviews with writer Piri Thomas and community leader Luis Fuentes as well as essays on the gay and lesbian question, the African American connection, and the current struggle over the island of Vieques.

The analytical essays in *The Puerto Rican Movement* are highly partisan and suffer from a tendency to romanticize the past, with the exception of Carmen Teresa Whalen on the Young Lords in Philadelphia and José Cruz's analysis of radicalism in Hartford in the 1960s and 1970s. In some instances, highly debatable propositions are presented as facts. For example, Andrés Torres's "Political Radicalism in the Diaspora" offers a brief review of twentieth-century Puerto Rican political history, in which he states, "in 1917 Puerto Ricans were made U.S. citizens, an act that subjected them to the military draft for World War I" (p. 3). The assumption here is that the sole intention of the Jones Act was to draft Puerto Ricans in the U.S. war effort.

This issue is simply not that clear-cut. Perhaps a reading of José Cabranes's *Citizenship and the American Empire: Notes on the Legislative History of the U.S. Citizenship of Puerto Ricans* would have shed light on the two widely accepted explanations of U.S. citizenship for Puerto Ricans. One held that Puerto Ricans yearned to become citizens. The second claimed that U.S. citizenship was imposed on Puerto Ricans. As Cabranes has pointed out, "the truth lies somewhere between contradictory historical theses."<sup>13</sup> Cabán's *Constructing a Colonial People* offers a historically accurate analysis of the implementation of the Jones Act. More important, his discussion places the legislation where it belongs, in the context of a domestic program intended to halt Puerto Rico's growing discontent with Washington's colonial policies. This explanation differs markedly from Torres's implied contention that the act was a desperate war measure.

These ten books are only a sample of recent scholarship on Puerto

13. José Cabranes, *Citizenship and the American Empire: Notes on the Legislative History of the U.S. Citizenship of Puerto Ricans* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979), 14.

Rico, but a few generalizations can be drawn from them. First, works on Puerto Rico cannot divorce the country's trajectory from the impact of colonialism. Second, the rush to interpret Puerto Rico's past through the eyes of the country's "*hombres ilustres*" is slowing down. Third, previously disreputable topics such as gender and racial discrimination, sexuality, and salsa music are now recognized as valid subjects of inquiry. Fourth, the contours of Puerto Rican identity are more blurred than ever. The aerial bridge between the island and the United States has created a generation with deeper roots in Hartford and New York than in San Juan and Ponce. Whether we recognize it or not, this is the true legacy of Operation Bootstrap, the Estado Libre Asociado, and the illustrious men who once promised that Puerto Rico could have the best of both worlds.