ereign nationhood was not without its anomalies and, as often as not, served as an opportunity for the reiteration of the colonial condition, if in new forms. Under the guise of “nation building,” new nations received successive waves of foreign consultants, including economic planners, constitutional consultants, educational advisers, and urban planners, most of whom arrived bearing models of modernity through which old colonial susceptibilities were inscribed into the premise of new nationhood.

Foreign architects and engineers—mostly North American—descended on Cuba all through the first half of the twentieth century. They arrived in discharge of market forces with fixed ideas of what the Cuban modern should look like. Much of what served to represent Cuban “national identity” originated as a notion of the tropics as imagined by North Americans, that is, the representation of Cuba as the tropical Other. New York architects Schultz and Weaver designed the Sevilla Biltmore Hotel, the Concha Beach Club, and the Casino Nacional. The Hotel Nacional, completed in 1930 and hailed at the time as the “quintessential Cuban hotel,” was designed by New York architectural firm McKim, Mead and White. Kenneth MacKenzie Murchison designed the Havana Central Railway Station in Old Havana.

Much of the architecture of the middle third of the twentieth century, Hyde correctly suggests, was dedicated to a larger moral project, designed to give visible form and functional purpose to an emerging constitutional sensibility. Specifically, Hyde indicates his intent to trace “the discursive reciprocities of architecture and law through the concept of constitutionalism” (p. 15).

This makes for a very dismal history, a story of plans, programs, and projects inspired by the promulgation of the 1940 Constitution, given to the celebration of constitutional idealism and the desire to promote civic pride and patriotism—few of which came to fruition. Many of the architects and engineers engaged in “constitutional modernism” as an urban project were foreigners, who brought to the task of municipal planning ideas of modernity and constitutional legality derived from abstract notions of the rule of law and due process, much of which had little to do with Cuban political culture. This is in fact very much an urban history—the inclusion of “Cuba” in the title is actually a misnomer, for Hyde’s focus is principally Havana—where ideals of modernity implied in notions of civil society and constitutional legality crashed against the political reality of Cuba during the 1940s and 1950s. Hyde depicts in splendid form the ideals that inspired scores of urban planners, many of whom seemed oddly aloof from the condition of moral squalor and political corruption that coursed its way through Cuban public life at mid-century. It strained public credulity to advance the proposition of enlightened constitutionalism after March 1952, when General Fulgencio Batista seized power through a barracks revolt and thereupon proceeded to suspend the 1940 Constitution, dissolve congress, and impose censorship. Efforts to restore constitutional legality three years later failed to inspire public confidence, and soon thereafter Cuba descended into the bleak abyss of political violence and civil strife. “In these circumstances,” Hyde properly asks, “how could architecture make its appearance in civil society other than as a compromised reflection of those circumstances, or as fiction to conceal them?” (pp. 297–298).

This is a study, then, of high hopes and great expectations, of architectural renderings of constitutional sensibilities interpreted mostly by foreigners who were perhaps unduly naïve about the reality of the Cuban republic. It is possible too that any project inspired by constitutionality—including the 1940 Constitution—was doomed to fail in 1950s Cuba. Hyde has rendered a valuable service in providing an account of what modern constitutionalism in Cuba might have looked like, under different historical circumstances.

Louis A. Pérez, Jr.
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill


The construction of an empire is never a unilateral enterprise. Neither are responses to imperial policies. Both involve processes that are complex, contradictory, and to a very large extent negotiated. This understanding has been the product of an extensive scholarship on colonialism and empire produced in an array of disciplines.

Solsiree del Moral has made a significant addition to that scholarship in her recent book, Negotiating Empire: The Cultural Politics of Schools in Puerto Rico, 1898–1952. The main thesis of this well-researched and convincingly argued book is that schools, teachers, parents, and students played a central role in the processes of building a colonial state and constructing national identities in Puerto Rico after the country’s acquisition by the United States following the Spanish-Cuban-American War of 1898.

According to del Moral, teachers “were not simple transmitters of US colonial policies but, rather, critical actors who challenged and negotiated Americanization ideologies daily through the schools” (p. 10). Parents and students also engaged with colonial administrators in order to demand access to educational opportunities that would transform students into better “citizens.” In the process, they not only reproduced the colonial state that was emerging from imperial educational policies and practices but also promoted visions of a distinct national identity thought to define Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans. These seemingly contradictory phenomena took place within the context of an ongoing dynamic of change from a traditional, mostly rural, society to a modern, increasingly urban, community.

The book constitutes a welcome “bottom-up” account of a very complex history. It goes beyond the stan-
standard narrative developed by earlier examinations of the period, which had concentrated on the visions and policies of the commissioners of education appointed by U.S. presidents to oversee the public school system in the island (see Aida Negrón de Montilla, La americanización en Puerto Rico y el sistema de instrucción pública, 1900–1930 [1998]). By incorporating the voices of teachers, parents, and students, it provides a more comprehensive understanding of the role that schools played in the construction of modern Puerto Rico. Moreover, the author makes explicit connections with colonial educational projects designed to deal with subordinated populations in the U.S. South, Hawai’i, the Philippines, Native American communities, and new immigrant communities. It also places Puerto Rico’s educational policies of the time in the wider context of analogous developments in Latin America and the Caribbean.

The centrality of gender, class, and race in the author’s interrogation of this historical period constitutes a significant contribution to the history of U.S. imperial policies in Puerto Rico. Chapter three, “Citizenship, Gender and Schools,” is particularly illuminating. Del Moral does an outstanding job weaving together colonialism, class, gender, race, and different social and political ideologies, such as social feminism, suffragism, moral reformism, and political autonomy. She describes the conflicts among liberal, radical, and conservative teachers, many of which were related to gender roles in the new colonial society. The connection among illiteracy, masculinity, and war is revealing. Similarly worth noting is her discussion of “physical illiteracy”—the basis of a prominent effort to “regenerate” young men and women through gendered physical education programs.

Chapter four provides a useful introduction to the constitutive role played by discourses regarding the Puerto Rican diaspora in the United States on the part of certain sectors of American society and of elite intellectuals and politicians in Puerto Rico itself. If chapter three underlines the role of gender in the imperial enterprise, chapter four underscores the racial dimension of U.S. imperialism in Puerto Rico and the Caribbean.

Chapter five examines letters sent by students and parents to the authorities requesting financial assistance in order to attend school. Del Moral concludes that students and parents were actively engaged in shaping the educational policies of colonial administrators. However, her exclusive reliance on those sources—which point to the more assertive students and parents—leaves the reader wondering whether her conclusion adequately portrays the attitude of most families.

The text would have benefited also from an elaboration of what the author means by “citizenship.” She seems to conflate the legal category of U.S. citizenship with the more general notion of “citizenship” prevalent in recent political and sociological scholarship on the subject. It seems to me that del Moral does not completely capture the many nuances of the concept of citizenship (ciudadanía) employed by Puerto Ricans (then and now) in their daily discourse.

In all, nevertheless, del Moral’s book is a solid piece of writing that contributes substantially to better understanding of a fascinating and complex period in U.S., Puerto Rican, Latin American, and Caribbean history.

EFREN RIVERA-RAMOS
University of Puerto Rico


There is a long tradition within Mexican historiography of examining indigenous society as it evolved under colonialism. Caterina Pizzigoni’s fine study focuses on one Mexican region—the Toluca Valley—during the colonial period and places this older tradition within a newer one: the privileged use of indigenous-language documents as central to research. Using documents written in Nahuatl or other indigenous languages is no longer a new trend, but Pizzigoni extends this methodology by also including some Spanish-language documents among her sources. Pizzigoni’s study of the Toluca Valley joins the excellent work of historians Stephanie Wood and Deborah Kanter. Yet, the choice of Toluca seems to have been predicated more on the availability of Nahuatl records than on its role within the colony.

Pizzigoni used notarial documents, primarily the 220 wills that form the corpus of her research, ecclesiastical administrative records, and some lawsuits. Her goal is to provide a more intimate portrait of the lives of indigenous men and women. She seeks to locate and analyze their point of view and to elaborate their concepts, vocabulary, and experiences. Her analysis is more thematic than chronological. She begins with a section on places (houses and land). The testaments provide fascinating details about how houses were actually organized and which saints indigenous residents had adopted. She is able to re-create the typical format of dwellings and their principal elements. These were primarily the residences of farmers and so they generally included a corral, a corncrib, but also an oratory. In the section on land, she introduces a concept called “distant land.” These were plots of land that were located far from the village, anywhere within the countryside. Her primary focus, however, is on inheritance patterns and how both gender and Hispanic law influenced them.

The author then turns her attention to the people of the Toluca Valley. She has separate chapters on the ways they constructed their identities, their interactions with each other, and their activities. While much of historians’ attention regarding identity in Latin America has been centered on questions of race, Pizzigoni focuses on kinship and its Nahuatl vocabulary as well as naming patterns. Under interactions, she looks at the