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Liberating notions of culture and citizenship have been critical issues that Puerto Ricans have grappled with, one could argue, since American naval ships arrived in Puerto Rico in 1898. A consistent challenge for scholars is how to write about Puerto Rican citizenship without reducing Puerto Rican rights, privileges, and protections as hegemonic principals, determined and constructed only by U.S. actors. Solsiree del Moral takes on this challenge by putting forth a history of how citizenship and identity were constructed and contested in school sites throughout Puerto Rico in the first half of the twentieth century.

Using schools as a central space for the construction of national identity and citizenship education is not a new analytical stance in educational
histories. Nevertheless, del Moral’s book, *Negotiating Empire*, is a welcome addition to scholarship about a derivative form of citizenship construction, one that is constructed in post-colonial societies where a self-determining form of citizenship is not wholly achievable. In other words, because Puerto Rico did not gain full independence and, instead, became a commonwealth as a result of the Spanish-American War, a historical analysis of citizenship is particularly difficult to explain because it must consider the tension between Puerto Rican social/cultural practices and U.S. legal and economic jurisdiction. The island’s unique political status as a Commonwealth of the United States, alongside the continuation, indeed survival of Puerto Rican culture and Spanish language, necessitates an examination that can make plain the various contextual nuances and influences disparate school settings had throughout the island that contributed to producing the Puerto Rican citizen.

This herculean task to explain identity and citizenship construction is more challenging in the case of Puerto Rico for two additional reasons. First, the notion of colonial citizenship is malleable in that its definition is subject to unpredictable political policies from both Puerto Rican and U.S. political actors. Second, because of its flexible nature, this type of citizenship is neither politically or culturally secure. The construction of civic identity in Puerto Rico, argues del Moral, is distinctive because of political consequences that shifted colonial control, but, as del Moral underscores throughout the book, this shift did not negate core cultural and social practices. In fact, because of the dynamic nature of Puerto Ricans as individuals and a group, lessons in citizenship at schools were the result of the melding and negotiation of traditional and modern ideas about who and what a Puerto Rican is under U.S. political rule. Thus, del Moral’s central thesis is that Puerto Rican identities and practices of citizenship were not imagined or constructed by a Puerto Rican leadership separate from cultural, historical ideas about what it meant to be Puerto Rican during the period under examination.

Solsiree del Moral begins her examination of *Hacer patria (o, la construcción de puertorriqueños)* as both an imagined and implicit construction that took place within Puerto Rican homes and schools. For turn-of-the-century Puerto Rico this would mean (and was demanded by Puerto Ricans) the building of a strong public school system that did not erode their Latin/Hispanic heritage. The central actors who controlled the process of identity and citizenship construction as both a narrative to learn and an imbedded cultural identity, argues del Moral, were the local teachers and community leaders who supervised, interpreted, and enacted educational policies that were authorized from both U.S. and San Juan policy makers over the five decades that del Moral analyzes. Her resurrection of Puerto Rican educational martyrs such as maestro Rafael and his sister Celestina
(chapters one and two), as well as important Puerto Rican intellectual forums, including the founding of the Asociación de Maestros de Puerto Rico (AMPR, Association of Teachers of Puerto Rico) serves as critical examples of local and regional control over educational polices imported into the island (chapter two). And central to curriculum scripts and implementation of instruction was the continuation of Spanish as the native and educational language of Puerto Ricans. It was the educational leaders who were at the forefront of resistance to English-only educational policies.

Beyond the island itself, del Moral traces Puerto Rico’s intertwined political and educational history in alignment with other Latin American national school projects during the early-twentieth century. As such, Del Moral deftly situates Puerto Rico alongside other non-colonial, Spanish speaking nations that also sought to use the growth of public schooling as a means to construct national identity. Coinciding with the contraction of Spain as a colonial power, the steady growth of public schools in Spanish speaking nations at the turn of the twentieth century allowed for a citizenship construction that was specific to cultural practices that were defined by the Spanish language, Catholic religious practices and education, patriarchal social hierarchy, and the post-colonial remains of racialized social practices and stratifications that set social-political limits for non-White, Spanish speaking peoples. These Latin/Hispanic identifications in Spanish speaking nations would be revolutionized, contested, and solidified in the decades prior to mid-century, but some national groups in the Caribbean did not shed colonial rule definitively. In the case of Puerto Rico, their “new” colonial status with the U.S. brought to the island a non-Spanish speaking culture and political rule that tested and continues to test the stability of their particular Latin/Hispanic culture under White, Anglo, English-speaking, and empire-building jurisdictions. It is at this point that del Moral shifts her comparison of Puerto Rican schooling experiences and argues that Puerto Ricans were marginalized within schools and the larger society in similar ways that Hawaiians, Filipinos, and black Americans were during the first half of the twentieth century. These two comparisons, at times, make the reader wonder which social-political semblance is more appropriate. Specifically, that racialized conceptions of citizenship practiced by the U.S. during empire building cannot be directly compared to racialized notions of citizenship in different Latin America countries during this similar time period.

The heart of Negotiating Empire can be found in chapters three and four, where del Moral utilizes a multitude of source materials to explain how and to what extent Puerto Ricans constructed, recognized, and practiced colonial citizenship in primary and secondary schools and, more particularly, teacher preparation programs. These sources also serve to account for the growth of schools and teachers, many of whom were from the middle class
in Puerto Rico. It was the Puerto Rican middle-class teaching force, argues del Moral, that contributed to modernizing social and cultural practices, while at the same time protecting a traditional sense of what it meant to be *puertorriqueño*. This is illustrated by del Moral analysis of how progressive ideas about Puerto Rican culture alongside American citizenship were more keenly felt by women, as the Puerto Rican teaching profession feminized during the 1920s and 1930s. But any security or advantage colonial citizenship provided to Puerto Ricans on the island was contested once they immigrated to the mainland, where racism, segregation, immigration exclusions, and socio-economic conditions trumped any perceived or constructed advantage of colonial citizenship.

What is refreshing about del Moral analysis is that she decenters the role of U.S. educational policy makers in Puerto Rico and instead focuses on what and how local Puerto Rican leaders and organizations, alongside students and their families, put policies into practice, but only after they were filtered through native social and cultural ideologies.

Additionally, Del Moral's book includes a historical background that contextualizes the cultural politics of schooling in Puerto Rico, including the political and economic consequences that exchanged Spanish colonialism for U.S. colonialism, which in turn brought U.S. educational policies and practices to the island. Yet del Moral's analysis concentrates on the role of teachers and educational leaders who had lived through, contested, and enacted these policies from the (American) mainland. Overall, del Moral’s examination of the interplay of race, gender, national identity, and citizenship construction as it is played against financial dependence and strong political influence both on the island and mainland (and in comparison to other non-white dependencies) provides a rich, texturized narrative of why remaining culturally Puerto Rican was critical to the success of constructing citizenship for the commonwealth. Furthermore, del Moral’s extensive use of Spanish-language sources adds a much-needed injection into the educational historiographies about schooling in the Western Hemisphere that too often rely only on English language primary and secondary source materials.