

History of Puerto Rico

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One of the most stimulating current trends in historical writing on Puerto Rico is the examination of the relations between Puerto Rico and the US. Reflecting newer theoretical understandings of colonialism as a negotiated process between colonial and metropolitan actors, the gaze of the historian has turned to culture, schools, and sports as the sites of struggle. Focusing on the complex interactions that took place in Puerto Rican schools during the first half of the 20th century, Del Moral shows how teachers, parents, and students engaged the official Americanization policies, promoting their own visions of national identity and of citizenship rights ([bi2014001002](#)). In so doing, teachers played a critical role in the transformation of state policies. But contradictorily, their actions served to strengthen the colonial state, ultimately leading to the consolidation of US rule in Puerto Rico. An international sports competition is the lens through which Sotomayor seeks to understand the complicated nature of Puerto Rico's political status as a commonwealth of the US ([bi2015000706](#)).

The history of racial politics in Puerto Rico has piqued the interest of historians. Rodríguez-Silva explores the practices of racialization in Puerto Rico from the late 19th to the early 20th century ([bi2013004539](#)). Due to political contingencies, the creole elites and the working classes framed their demands for greater political freedoms and social rights in a language that avoided explicit references to issues of race and blackness. Over time, these practices had the overall effect of eroding public debate about race problems in Puerto Rico society. Picó provides glimpses into how racialization practices played out in an urban context in a later time ([bi2015000701](#)). During the 1930s and 1940s, Santurce was a society in flux. For a local elite anxious to maintain privileges and social boundaries, those who deviated from the accepted norms were called *titeres*. Though generally applied to dark-skinned teenagers who made any transgression, the connotation of the term, the author argues, was not entirely racial. Any transgressor, regardless of race, was potentially a *titere*.

A spate of works deal with agrarian, economic, social, and labor history topics. Moscoso views the struggles between the government and the landed creole elite from the southern jurisdiction (*partido*) of San Germán in the early 18th century as a political strategy stirred by the defense of the regional elite's economic interests ([bi2013005408](#)). In a study about the rise of commercial

agriculture in Ponce, Picó highlights the central role of the nonelite population, especially the slaves, but also the free workers, artisans, and small-holders, in these transformations ([bi2015000700](#)). Reichard de Cancio ([bi2015000702](#)) and Vázquez Medina ([bi2013005412](#)) trace the development of two sugarcane estates, Hacienda Santa Rita in Guánica and Hacienda Monserrate in Manatí, respectively. These two studies confirm the findings of previous research, showing the extent of control of hacienda property by European immigrant interests. Vargas Canales analyzes the emblematic island-wide strike of sugarcane workers in 1934 ([bi2013005410](#)). For his part, Shaffer delves into the history of the Puerto Rican anarchist movement in the early decades of the 20th century ([bi2013002022](#)). Based in the tobacco industry, this dynamic sector of the radical Left was intimately linked to a vast regional anarchist network interconnecting the Caribbean to the US.

Political biography has made a comeback in recent years. This is partly related to the research agenda of the nonpartisan Centro Interamericano para el Estudio de las Dinámicas Políticas (CIEDP) at the Universidad Interamericana. CIEDP has launched a publication series dedicated to critical reflections about the contributions of past statesmen and intellectual figures to modern Puerto Rico. Scholars, intellectuals, and political figures reflect on the significance of Jaime Benítez ([bi2015001403](#)) and Arturo Morales Carrión ([bi2015000550](#)), who straddled the fields of academe and public service; lawmaker Santiago Polanco Abreu ([bi2015000704](#)), and planner and economist Roberto de Jesús Toro ([bi2015000703](#)). Besides essays by noted contributors, the volumes contain interviews, anecdotes, and select personal correspondence of the featured figures.

The personal and public lives of two of the most influential former governors and statesmen in Puerto Rico—Luis Muñoz Marín and Luis A. Ferré—are the subjects of books by two prominent historians, Carmelo Rosario Natal on Muñoz ([bi2013005415](#)), and Guillermo A. Baralt on Ferré ([bi2015000551](#)). Rodríguez Beruff's edited volume of William D. Leahy's memoirs further expands our knowledge of Puerto Rico during a transitional period in the island's history. Leahy's memoirs provide one of the few available testimonies of North American officials appointed to serve in Puerto Rico during the early 1940s ([bi2015000705](#)).

International scholarly collaboration has yielded noteworthy contributions to Puerto Rican studies. The volume *Historia de Puerto Rico*, edited by González Vales and Luque forms part of a five-volume set *Historia de las Antillas*, coordinated by Consuelo Naranjo Orovio at the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas based in Madrid ([bi2015000712](#)). With contributions from Puerto Rican and Spanish specialists, the volume presents well-informed surveys of the island's history from the 16th century to the present, covering social, economic, and political topics as well as developments in literature, the arts, and culture in general. Covering both the Hispanic and the non-Hispanic Caribbean, the complete set brings to date previous landmark collaborative projects such as the multivolume *Cambridge History of Latin America*, under the general direction of Leslie Bethell, and the six-volume *General History of the Caribbean* commissioned by UNESCO several years ago. The outcome of an international conference, *Historia de las gobernaciones atlánticas en el Nuevo Mundo* brings together a collection of papers examining the development of the *gobernación*, one of the central institutions of colonial administration in the Atlantic world. Case studies from Puerto Rico, the

Caribbean, South and Central America, and the Iberian Peninsula appear in the volume ([bi2013005409](#)).

Historians can rely on a growing selection of print and online resources that support critical stages of the research process. These include not only reference and bibliographic tools but also online archives of primary source materials. An important reference tool worth mentioning is the historical dictionary of weights and measure terminology used throughout the Hispanic Caribbean during the 16th century compiled by Moscoso ([bi2015000554](#)). Concentrating on the 19th and 20th centuries, the *Encyclopedia of U.S.-Latin American Relations* covers the intellectual, political, economic, and military interconnections between the US and the countries of Latin America, including Puerto Rico ([bi2015001404](#)).

Cooperation between libraries, archives, and other repositories have resulted in the adoption of digitization as a means of preservation and as a vehicle to facilitate access to unique collections of rare books, periodicals, and archival fonds via the Internet. These developments have greatly improved the repertoire of online research content available to study Puerto Rico. Maintained by the Biblioteca Nacional de España, the *Biblioteca Digital Hispánica* is a valuable resource for research on Puerto Rican topics ([bi2015000708](#)). Materials include official government reports on administrative affairs, finances, and social and economic conditions on the island as well as newspapers, cartographic and iconographic content and history tracts. For example, the full-text of the works by journalist and historian Salvador Brau is available in this collection. This digital portal serves as the matrix for content available through the *Biblioteca Digital del Patrimonio Iberoamericano* collection (BDPI) ([bi2015000707](#)). The *Portal de Archivos Españoles* (PARES) provides access to digitized content from eleven archives managed by the Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte in Spain ([bi2015000711](#)). The archival fonds in the Archivo General de Indias, the Archivo Histórico Nacional, and the Archivo General de Simancas are particularly relevant for the history of Puerto Rico under Spanish rule. The *Caribbean Newspaper Digital Library* (CNDL) provides access to both historical and contemporary newspapers, literary journals, government gazettes, and other periodical sources from the Caribbean ([bi2015000709](#)). Periodicals of research value from Puerto Rico include partial runs of the now ceased daily *El Mundo* (San Juan) for the 1928 and 1936-39 and the nearly complete series of the *Gaceta de Puerto Rico* for the 1837-69 period. The *Biblioteca Digital Puertorriqueña* is a CNDL partner institution (see [HLAS 68: bi2012005783](#)). It should be noted that CNDL is affiliated with the *Digital Library of the Caribbean* (dLOC), a leading cooperative initiative of interest to students of Puerto Rican history. Managed by Florida International University, the range of research materials available in this portal covers not only newspapers and official documents, but also historic and contemporary maps and images ([bi2015000710](#)).

Furthermore, recent digitization projects have not only contributed to increasing the volume of resources available for research on Puerto Rican topics but, more importantly, to preserving the cultural and historical patrimony of Puerto Rico. A case in point is the *Puerto Rican Civil Court Documents Collection 1844-1900* ([bi2015000713](#)). This original manuscript collection of 19th-century legal documents from the Arecibo court district is currently archived at the University of Connecticut Libraries. Researchers now have free online access to a valuable collection of civil court cases involving disputes over slaves, land, and other issues from one of Puerto Rico's most important agricultural regions during the 19th century.