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Reseña de "Puerto Rico under Colonial Rule: Political Persecution and the Quest for Human Rights"
de Ramón Bosque Pérez y José Javier Colón Morera (eds.)
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In *Boricua Pop*, Negrón-Muntaner offers daring challenges to the nationalist political elites exposing their adamant nationalist pride as an attempt to compensate for the historical shame of colluding and collaborating with the colonialist project. She brings fresh inquiries to the debates surrounding popular icons such as Jennifer Lopez, Ricky Martin, and Madonna while demonstrating original analysis of artists and performers like Holly Woodlawn and Jean-Michel Basquiat. While the argument that Puerto Rican national identity is based on a historical oscillation between shame and valorization is compelling, the question that still lingers for the reader is, Where does this oscillation leave the everyday Puerto Rican, who consumes and absorbs the Boricua pop-culture author is examining? If commodification does not result in a complete (re)valorization of Puerto Rican identity, then what alternatives are there? The questions provoked by this text of themselves, however, demonstrate a significant contribution Negrón-Muntaner’s *Boricua Pop* makes to the continuing discourse on Puerto Rican cultural nationalism.

**Puerto Rico under Colonial Rule:**
**Political Persecution and the Quest for Human Rights**

Edited by Ramón Bosque-Pérez and José Javier Colón Morera
Albany: SUNY Press, 2006
256 pages; $23.95 [paper]

**REVIEWER:** Andrés Torres, The City University of New York—Center for Puerto Rican Studies

This anthology is a solid addition to the literature on anticolonial struggles in 20th-century Puerto Rico. It contains a critical analysis of the handling of dissident movements by the United States and Commonwealth governments and provides a sorely needed English language source on the interplay between state-sponsored repression, political sovereignty, and human rights. Contributing authors also take a look at recent social tensions that are driven by ongoing poverty and drug-related criminality, and assess how these tensions threaten human and civil rights. The final section addresses the historic Vieques struggle, examining the role of autonomous mass organizations in expanding civil society and bolstering the capacity of social movements.
pro-Independence dissidents, dating back to the 1930s. Serrano, who writes the foreword to this book, then turned over the files to the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, which is constructing an on-line archive of these materials. These two sources now constitute a mother lode for future research on political persecution in Puerto Rico. The co-editors of this book were active participants in the campaigns to have both of these secret files released to the public.

The background to this history is further elaborated in a series of chapters that detail the drama of repression against Puerto Rico's militants and dissidents. María E. Estades-Font examines previously classified reports of the Military Intelligence Division of the U.S. Army, revealing the surveillance program conducted against the Nationalist Party during the 1930s, the period leading up to violent confrontation between the Party and the colonial government. Essays by José (Che) Paralitici and Ivonne Acosta-Lespier describe, respectively, the numerous cases of imprisonment of anticolonial militants during the first half of the 20th century, and the impact of anti-Nationalist legislation in the post-World War II period. The case of the clandestine militant organization, the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional (FALN), is given full treatment by Jan Susler, an attorney who has been involved for decades in the legal efforts for the release of political prisoners. Alberto Márquez examines the role, historically and contemporaneously, of political intelligence in laying the groundwork for repression and creating an atmosphere of fear and distrust among opponents of the colonial status quo.

A principal concern addressed in this collection is the rising social tensions in the past decade. Recent years have seen the worsening of drug-related crime and homicide in Puerto Rico. The police and FBI have been given a free hand to raid homes and interdict alleged trafficking activities, often ignoring legal and civil rights. Such is the state of affairs that measures once thought of as outside the pale of civility and tradition are being increasingly endorsed by official and an exasperated public: capital punishment is now up for debate.

It is in this changing context that Benítez-Nazario's study of patterns of intolerance takes on special significance. His chapter, based on an opinion poll administered in the mid-1990s, concludes that there has been a shift in the sectors that are targeted by discrimination. During the 1960s and 1970s, according to studies by Puerto Rico's Civil Rights Commission, pro-independence sectors faced the most intolerance. He is reluctant to say that political intolerance has waned, but does not offer a strong rationale for this apparent shift, other than to argue "we do not admit it (i.e., political intolerance of independentistas) as we did before..." (p. 113).

Today the primary targets of discrimination seem to be gays and lesbians, ex-convicts and foreigners (Dominicans, mostly). Contemporary intolerance is influenced by regional and political identity. Dominicans are more openly accepted in the western part of the island (where they have been present for much longer) than in metropolitan San Juan. Pro-Independence individuals are the most tolerant toward the various "disliked" groups. Interestingly, Statehooders are more tolerant than are Commonwealth sympathizers toward the various "disliked" groups.

Appreciating the link between economic progress and human rights can help formulate new approaches to the quest for self-determination. Colón Morera believes that only an expansion of political autonomy can provide the
leverage necessary to reduce poverty and crime, and thereby ward off the threats to human rights. The ultimate source of the growing social conflict (which has been used to justify federal and state incursion into human rights) is Puerto Rico’s lack of control over its own economic development strategies. Unless major institutional changes are made that allow Puerto Rico greater say over trade and investment policies, *La Isla* will continue subjected to a dangerous chain of causality: economic stagnation leading to rising crime and poverty, which leads to rising social tension, which in turn leads to the limitation of human rights.

Appeals to absolute principles, such as the right of self-determination and freedom from political persecution, may resonate with the masses but not necessarily motivate them to action. Generally, the popular and poor sectors are concerned with immediate, day-to-day socioeconomic pressures. They are reluctant to engage in political change in the “absence of well-defined political and transitional mechanisms” (p. 96). By showing how the restricted policy options inherent in the Commonwealth status undermine social well-being, Colón Morera hopes to provide a reality-based logic for sovereignty and the associated goals of economic progress and human rights. He is guarded about the prospects for unleashing a broad movement toward full decolonization but finds hopeful signs in the recent struggle to demilitarize Vieques.

For half a century the U.S. Navy used the Puerto Rican island of Vieques as a site to practice military tactics and bombardment. And for half a century Puerto Ricans were trying to end the destruction and contamination of the land and beaches. The third and final section of this book is devoted to this issue. Two chapters delve into the historical background to the controversy. Vieques is really part of an archipelago, of which Puerto Rico is the main island. U.S. military and government officials have historically underestimated the attachment that “mainlanders” had for the beautiful beaches and terrain of Vieques island. Suárez-Badillo traces this affection to the period of Spanish colonialism, showing how important Vieques was to the development of a unique Puerto Rican identity.

Before parts of the island were turned over for military purposes there was a series of land expropriations and displacement of civilians during the 1940s. César Ayala and Viviana Carro-Figueroa recount this episode, based on data from land tenure files and interviews conducted by the American Friends Service Committee in 1979. They provide a richly detailed description of the process by which families were maneuvered out of their livelihoods and possessions.

The final chapter brings the discussion back full circle to the question of (and quest for) human rights. Colón Morera weighs in again, aided by co-author José E. Rivera Santana, with a Gramscian perspective on the significance of the Vieques struggle. The authors cite Puerto Rico, where eighty percent of the eligible population votes, as an example of what they call “electoralist political culture.” Unfortunately little of substance is decided since Puerto Rican elections are mostly about which variant of colonialism will administer the state bureaucracy. Greatly needed is a broad democratic civil society, wherein the citizenry “breaks with key elements of traditional political participation. Its most promising and lasting social mechanisms to generate agreement for common social action” (p. 210).
(b) a sustained and broad-based campaign of civil disobedience, (c) the involvement of cultural, environmental, labor, and religious sectors, (d) internationalization of the movement, and (e) very importantly, integral participation of the Puerto Rican diaspora in the United States. The authors argue that replication of these elements on a broader scale are necessary for the achievement of a vibrant civil society that can lead to full decolonization.

For those observers of modern Puerto Rico who cling to the notion of a benevolent U.S. government overseeing its island territory, the events of September 23, 2005 should prove disquieting. On that day, as independentistas gathered for the annual celebration of El Grito de Lares, an FBI-led operation was directed at Filiberto Ojeda Ríos, a fugitive and well-known figure in the movement. The events surrounding his killing by sniper fire are still under investigation, but the reaction by the Puerto Rican public was one of horror and repudiation. It is hard not to believe that this targeted assassination, conducted under the political cover provided by the Patriot Act, timed to strike a blow of intimidation against the anticolonial sectors. Certainly the themes addressed by Bosque Pérez and Colón Morera—that is, the uses of repression and threats to human rights in Puerto Rico—are as relevant today as ever.

Latinos in New England
Edited by Andrés Torres
344 pages; $27.95 [paper]

REVIEWER: GINA PÉREZ, Oberlin College

In her recent book Barrio Dreams, Arlene Dávila observes a troubling elision in urban and Latino studies scholarship. Until recently, she writes, urban studies literature has not seriously attended to the work of Latina/o studies scholars who have developed a rich body of research documenting the experiences of Latinas/os in the shifting and transforming global metropolis (2004: 16). One of Dávila’s principal interventions, therefore, is not only “to disturb the dominant tenant of urban studies, where issues of race and ethnicity are consistently subsumed to a black-and-white paradigm that veils the complex multiethnic/multiracial dilemmas of contemporary cities” (9), but to contribute to a burgeoning literature on Latina/o populations. Andrés Torres’s edited anthology, Latinos in New England, does precisely that. The essays in the collection clearly demonstrate the need for attention to Latina/o populations that furthers, challenges, and transforms urban studies research on contemporary life in America’s cities and even in smaller towns. The anthology also advances the work of scholars committed to Latino Studies by providing a decidedly regional focus to a growing population that has received relatively little scholarly attention to date. While the articles in this anthology focus on contemporary concerns and, more specifically, on how Latino communities shape New England’s political, economic, and economic landscape, it is clear to immigrants within such analyses that Torres and his contributors are committed to documenting the forgotten/backgrounded histories of Latinas/os and Latin American immigrants.