

2013

H-Diplo

H-Diplo Article Reviews

h-diplo.org/reviews/

No. 422

Published on 18 September 2013

Updated, 13 June 2014

H-Diplo Article Review Editors: Diane N. Labrosse and
Dustin Walcher

Web and Production Editor: George Fujii

Commissioned for H-Diplo by Dustin Walcher

Robert C. McGreevey. "Empire and Migration: Coastwise Shipping, National Status, and the Colonial Legal Origins of Puerto Rican Migration to the United States." *The Journal of the Gilded Era and the Progressive Age* 11:4 (October 2012): 553-573. DOI:
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1537781412000394>

URL: <http://h-diplo.org/reviews/PDF/AR422.pdf>

Reviewed by **Michael Donoghue**, Marquette University

In this excellent article, Robert C. McGreevey addresses the question of what role legal interpretations of nationality and citizenship played in the migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States as laborers early in the twentieth century, just a few years after the occupation and annexation of Puerto Rico under the Treaty of Paris that ended the Spanish-American-Cuban-Filipino War. McGreevey demonstrates convincingly that changes in the commercial relations of the former Spanish-controlled island, and its new status as a U.S. possession, had a dramatic impact on the Puerto Rican economy that provoked labor migration to the United States and to other U.S. 'unincorporated territories.' Caught in a desperate search for work, individual Puerto Ricans fought to reconfigure a new identity short of citizenship but above 'alien' status that was complicated by U.S. labor laws and competing domestic economic interests. This debate over the status of Puerto Ricans in the newly expanding industrial imperium of the United States had far-reaching legacies for the relationship between the larger American society and what one litigant in this article called, "the children by late adoption" (559) i.e. inhabitants from recently acquired territories overseas. In recent decades, Americans have seen waves of immigrants from Korea, Vietnam, Laos, and Bosnia. That trend will no doubt continue with refugees from Iraq and Afghanistan, testifying to the on-going impact of imperial ventures overseas on the immigrant composition of U.S. society, and the conflicts that these individuals face as they struggle to find their place in the metropole and wrestle with new debates over what constitutes U.S. citizenship.

McGreevey starts by examining the case of Isabel González, a pregnant, twenty-year-old Puerto Rican widow who in 1902 tried to enter the United States to reunite with her new fiancé and her brother, a linoleum factory worker, in New York. U.S. immigration authorities at Ellis Island initially rejected her entry, claiming that she would become a

‘public charge’ and that she was an ‘alien’ and therefore subject to immigration restriction laws. But González’s attorneys countered that as an inhabitant of U.S. territory, Isabel was not a ‘foreigner’ and in fact, the Supreme Court later recognized her as ‘a U.S. national,’ a new category of status that while not connoting full U.S citizenship did allude to a strong connection to American society since González lived in what was now judged U.S. territory and not a foreign land. McGreevey describes how the U.S. annexation of Puerto Rico radically altered the Spanish colonial economy of that island since ‘coastwise’ laws now defined it as part of the U.S. coastline, and hence all its tropical exports, principally coffee, were required to be carried on American steamships that increased their costs and led to the loss of traditional markets. This sudden legal shift ruined the Puerto Rican coffee industry, which meant that thousands of workers were laid off and subsequently sought new livelihoods as migrants to the United States. Many were exploited and virtually kidnapped by labor contract firms that employed them in harsh conditions in other ‘unincorporated U.S. territories,’ such as Hawaii. Others, including women workers, endured mistreatment in rope factories in St. Louis where they constituted a kind of clandestine, easily-exploitable slave labor force. Meanwhile, the Supreme Court reversal in the earlier González case that accorded Isabel ‘U.S. national’ status alarmed many Anglo-Saxon Americans, who were already fearful over the tidal wave of foreign immigration from Europe and now worried that such legal decisions might encourage those they considered even more racially degenerate than Puerto Ricans, specifically Filipinos, to migrate to the United States in large numbers.

McGreevey analyzes the complex legal conundrum Puerto Rican migrants faced. Due to their perceived ‘non-alien’ status as inhabitants of American territory, they were deliberately recruited by some U.S. firms as a way to get around the 1885 Foran Act that forbade the use of foreign contract workers in the United States. But in their confrontation with immigration and legal authorities, Puerto Ricans were often categorized as ‘aliens’ and incarcerated or deported back to their island home. Puerto Ricans lived in this ‘status limbo’ until the 1917 Jones Act granted them a kind of U.S. ‘citizenship’ that still did not allow them to vote in presidential elections nor elect representatives to Congress. (Ironically up until 1917, while U.S. officials refused to ‘Americanize’ Puerto Ricans, they linguistically Americanized them by referring to their island as ‘Porto Rico’). McGreevey demonstrates in many insightful ways how the issue of immigration cannot be isolated from U.S. global power and economic expansion, a reality that the United States is living with today.

While within the context of an article-length analysis, McGreevey does a superb job of revealing the central legal issues in play, some other considerations might be developed in a larger monograph or more expansive essay. In the opening case study of Isabel González, one wonders how Victorian attitudes on gender and sexuality might have influenced the earlier judgments against her as an ‘unattached,’ single, pregnant woman and the links frequently made in this era between darker skin color and sexual immorality. Laura Briggs in *Reproducing Empire* investigated how U.S. medical and colonial authorities denigrated Puerto Rican sexuality, ‘promiscuity,’ and gendered behavior according to the

racist pseudo-science of the day.¹ Briggs has also uncovered the strong link in American minds between venereal disease in Puerto Rico and the notion that ‘immoral,’ indigenous women of color were the carriers of this ‘contamination’ within their own society– and potentially to the United States as migrants. The plight of the various Puerto Ricans addressed in this article could also be explored in greater depth within the larger context of turn-of-the-century racial ideologies arising from Social Darwinism, the 1896 *Plessey v. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision, and the era of Jim Crow, in which Americans of color, especially though not exclusively African-Americans, were systematically stripped of their effective citizenship. This connection of race to U.S. citizenship proved a powerful controversy that sparked debate across many levels of American society and is, of course, at the center of current scholarly inquiry.

In *The Blood of Government*, Paul Kramer addressed the pre-1898 efforts by Filipinos to carve out and/or redefine their status as citizens/subjects of the Spanish Empire.² Eileen Suárez Findlay’s *Imposing Decency* did the same for Puerto Rico.³ Ideas surrounding class and race-constructed assumptions about who were *gente decente* (decent people) worthy of Spanish citizenship – and who were not– that are discussed in her book might be applied here. The local *bourgeoisie* of San Juan and Ponce, sometimes in alliance, and often in conflict, with U.S. colonial officials, later saw themselves as representing the true and superior Puerto Rican *identidad* (identity) that would be worthy of U.S. citizenship. But working-class and rural Puerto Ricans, *trabajadores urbanos* and *jibaros/as*, struggled to construct competing notions of authentic Puerto Rican identity. A reader of McGreevey’s article might wonder what the reaction of U.S. officials would have been to the attempt of an educated, lighter-skinned, middle-class Puerto Rican’s entry into the United States in this period versus that of a Puerto Rican manual laborer. Class, as well as racial perceptions, often informed the societal assignation and rank of such individuals in both Puerto Rican and U.S. eyes. While slavery was never as powerful and all-pervasive an institution in colonial Puerto Rico as it was in Cuba, it existed, and Afro-Puerto Ricans comprised, according to some estimates, up to twenty percent of the island’s population in 1898. Indeed, during its recruitment efforts on the island, the U.S. military sorted Puerto Ricans into three categories: white, negro, and brown (the latter signifying *mulato* or *mestizo*). Were racial categories or references to gender present in the legal records that McGreevey has examined? If so, they might tell us a richer, more complex story of the forces and ideas in conflict here, although it must be admitted that the legal issues engaged by the author are quite fascinating and thought-provoking in their own right, and that he has certainly touched upon some of the larger themes addressed in this critique.

¹ Laura Briggs, *Reproducing Empire: Race Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002)

² Paul Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, The United States, and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006)

³ Eileen Suárez Findlay, *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870-1920* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000)

The famous Insular Cases of the Supreme Court (1901-1905), so named because they dealt with questions of whether constitutional rights automatically extended to the recent island acquisitions of Puerto Rico, Hawaii, Guam and the Philippines, managed by the War Department's Bureau of Insular Affairs, addressed a number of these complex problems. These cases left a powerful legacy as they established the doctrine of 'territorial incorporation' that the Constitution does 'follow the flag' to 'incorporated' but not to 'unincorporated territories,' such as Puerto Rico and the Philippines. The approximately twenty miles of coast, ten miles at each end, of the Panama Canal Zone were also judged to be part of the U.S. coastline, which greatly compromised Panamanian sovereignty regarding maritime law and commerce on its own shores. Up until 1937, children born in the Panama Canal Zone, even to two U.S.-born parents, were still judged to be 'U.S. nationals' – and not U.S. citizens due to their birth on 'unincorporated territory' – until they applied for the latter status using special forms provided by the State Department. These are just two further examples of how U.S. overseas expansion complicated notions of citizenship and commerce. McGreevey has sculpted a compelling confluence here of legal history, immigration history, and U.S. imperial history that points towards creative new ways of constructing U.S. foreign relations history. This reviewer can only applaud and encourage his future efforts in these directions.

Michael Donoghue is an Associate Professor of History at Marquette University. He received his BA (1995) and MA (1998) at the University of Rhode Island and his PhD (2006) at the University of Connecticut at Storrs. His book, *Borderland on the Isthmus: Race, Culture, and the Struggle for the Canal Zone* will be published by Duke University Press in the fall of 2013. Michael is currently conducting research in Cuba on the conflicts and relations between the U.S. military and the Cuban people in the decades prior to the triumph of the Cuban Revolution.

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