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RESEÑA DE "CONTRAPUNTO DE GÉNERO Y RAZA EN PUERTO RICO" DE IDSA
E. ALEGRÍA ORTEGA Y PALMIRA N. RÍOS GONZÁLEZ

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numbers of women accepting sewing piecework and a rise in property-related crime, to increased labor and socialist activism and even support for the Nationalist Party (although Carolina never was a leading center for the latter). Another feature of the era was the development of “public” recreation spaces on former ranches, known as “country clubs” but restricted to the San Juan elite and some privileged members of the local middle class; by contrast, the poor majority had to be content with the riverbanks as recreational spaces, one more manifestation of Carolina’s profoundly classist social relations (p. 143). Finally, during the Second World War, Puerto Rican government planners began considering San Juan and its municipal neighbors as a single regional urban entity. In 1950 Carolina became the third municipio to have a zoning plan, preceded only by San Juan and Río Piedras (p. 145). Construction of the international airport in the coastal wetlands of Isla Verde (once part of Cangrejos Arriba) heralded tremendous changes for Carolina’s future.

Chapter Five recounts Carolina’s transition to modern urban suburb from the 1950s to 1980. The new airport helped initiate Puerto Rico’s conversion into a major tourist destination, while the creeping advance of high rise beachfront condominiums and luxury hotels eventually eliminated the nostalgic Isla Verde of deserted beaches and informal eating and dancing establishments so loved by the locals (p. 161). The rest of Carolina began to experience an explosion of suburban housing developments and large shopping centers, also described in Chapter Six. Yet for most poor families displaced by the death of sugar cane the new *urbanizaciones* and industrial jobs were out of reach. As elsewhere in Puerto Rico and Latin America, land invasions (known popularly as *rescues*) took over unused

lands under control of Puerto Rico’s Land Authority; in Carolina the most famous was Villa Justicia, home to more than 1,300 families who the government never managed to dislodge (p. 173).

Chapter Six brings Carolina up to the present as the reinvented “Land of Giants.” The 1980 Census revealed not only that Carolina had become the island’s third largest city, but that most of its residents had been born elsewhere, thus illustrating the impact of urbanization on the city’s development. Carolina had left its rural past, yet “it must be asked where it was going” (p. 180). Local leaders faced the dilemma of satisfying the need, for example, of easier access to jobs—often in San Juan—while at the same time creating a sense of identity among a population without historical ties to the place. The municipio’s long-term plan for using historical figures, sports, and public works to encourage this Carolinian identity is noted but not fully analyzed. There are also brief references to women’s and senior citizen’s concerns, as well as the serious issue of crime and juvenile delinquency. The final chapter—more of an epilogue—enumerates some of the most recent statistics. Picó concludes by categorizing Carolina not as a “Land of Giants” but of “mills”: a city of workers, whose daily milling supplies the energy upon which society is based.

Picó’s previous histories of particular communities are known for emphasizing the common people: working class, marginalized, non-white. Although he desired to do the same for Carolina, the fact that he relied almost exclusively on official records—instead of providing balance through extensive oral history—resulted in much of the book’s reading like the “lifestyles of the rich and famous” similar to many other Puerto Rican municipal histories, instead of the more popular history he intended. Additionally, more extensive use of contextual analysis,

situating Carolina’s history within Puerto Rico, the Caribbean, and the world, would also have strengthened and enlivened the narrative. Nonetheless, the level of detail based on official and periodical records makes this book a valuable resource for Puerto Rican urban and social history.

Contrapunto de género y raza en Puerto Rico

Edited by Idsa E. Alegría Ortega and Palmira N. Ríos González

San Juan: Centro de Investigaciones Sociales, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2006
294 pages; \$20.00 [paper]

REVIEWER: MILAGROS DENIS, Rutgers: The State University of New Jersey—New Brunswick/Piscataway

Contrapunto de género y raza is an anthology designed to explore the intersectional of race and gender in Puerto Rico. The book is a result of an effort by a conscious and committed group of scholars who seek to combine their disciplines and creative talents to observe, analyze, and dismantle racial and sexual structures in Puerto Rican society. The essays and poems, which are elegantly composed by fifteen women and one man, document racism and sexism in Puerto Rico. And more importantly, the writers provide new evidence, case studies, and methodology of study how race and gender intersect to perpetuate systems of racial and gender discrimination. This review emphasizes primarily the key topics addressed in the book.

Racial discrimination is well documented, and to keen observers it is an integral part of Puerto Rican history. And yet the subject is a source of constant debate and denial among the intellectuals. Early 18th-century accounts of racism in Puerto Rico, for instance, is found in Fray Iñigo Abbad y La Sierra’s *Historia geográfica y civil*. He makes two important observations: the majority of the island’s population turned *mulata*, and *criollos* oppressed the black Puerto Ricans. In another historical account pertaining to the Haitian Revolution,

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which engulfed the Atlantic world, historians have documented the fears of white Puerto Ricans planters and the codes enacted by the Spanish colonial government to control the black population. Despite the numerous narratives of the period, some Puerto Rican intellectuals refuse to acknowledge racial oppression. They insist on seeing what they characterize as a class issue. Again, Puerto Rican intellectuals, like many of their counterparts in Latin America, continue to insist on defining the issue exclusively in class and not racial terms.

For instance, in the 1940s, authors such as Tomás Blanco labeled racial issue as “un juego de niños” or kid’s game in his book *El prejuicio racial en Puerto Rico*. In that same decade, however, José Colombán Rosario and Justina Carrión’s *El negro en Puerto Rico*, contrary to the assertion of Blanco, demonstrates the problem of racism and the economic disadvantages of black Puerto Ricans. Admittedly, there is a gap of twenty years with no major publications on the topic. In 1963, we have a major publication addressing the issue. Eduardo Seda-Bonilla’s *Los Derechos Cíviles en la sociedad puertorriqueña*, and ten years later, we have Isabelo Zenón Cruz’s *Narciso descubre su trasero*. Most recent

publications, particularly *Contrapunto de género y raza en Puerto Rico*, are not only shaking up the status quo, but they are also charting new paths in the study of racial and gender issues in Puerto Rican society. The new scholars are forthright and methodical in addressing the issues.

Contrapunto de género y raza is fresh, transparent, compelling, and overwhelmingly informative. Each one of the essays demonstrates how the fields of social sciences and humanities can be combined to address an overlooked and yet critical issue such as racism. It is not an easy task for a group of Puerto Rican intellectuals to produce a scholarly work on sensitive issues of race and gender. The scholars should be commended for addressing, defining, and analyzing the issues with care, insight, and thoroughness. How do gender and race intersect? This question is adequately answered in this volume.

In this anthology, the authors uncover different instances and patterns of racial and gender discrimination. The introduction provides a good review of the literature on the topic of race and gender and their impact in shaping the island's geopolitical and social space. For many years, particularly since the arrival of the Americans, the island of Puerto Rico has become a subject of various sociopolitical experiments, and the scholarship overlooks race and gender. With regard to the colonial structure of both the Spaniards and the Americans, two intrinsic elements can be identified in the book. First, we see perfect examples of the interweaving of racial discrimination and gender bias in Puerto Ricans' social behavior. How can we identify these social problems? How can we eradicate them? How can we demonstrate the complicity of the State in this situation? The authors argue that these and related questions can be addressed by acknowledging the intersectionality of race and gender,

which, in turn provides voice to black Puerto Ricans in the island's history.

The educational background of the writers—social and political scientist, historians, civil rights activist, and educators—contributes to the diversity and richness of the work presented. For example, from a literary point of view, we see how Roy-Féquièrre, in the celebrated feminist narrative of Maria Cadilla's *Hitos de la raza*, demonstrates the silencing of the voices of African and indigenous women. According to Roy-Féquièrre, Cadilla's *criollo* discourse overshadows and replaces the African character (Tate) in the story. Similar silencing took place when Cadilla attributes submissive and passive qualities to Ivianoca, a Taino female character in another of her stories. In other words, we see in both Cadilla's stories how African and Taino women are stereotyped.

The subtitle of this book should have been "day to day forms of racism." Racism creates mental blockage and deliberate ignorance with regard to the achievements and contributions of Afro-Puerto Ricans on and off the island. In this context, Jiménez-Muñoz makes a good argument about Carmen María Colón Pellot who was censured by her peers for attempting to expose Afro-Puerto Rican contributions. Colón Pellot's writings make her a target of censorship among the intellectual circles, even though she was not perceived as an anti-racism activist. Jiménez Muñoz observes that regardless of the intellectual sophistication of Colón Pellot, she remains a target of racial and gender biases. Moreover, by labeling her literary creation as a product of a "mujer resignada," her detractors attempt to exclude her remarkable poetry from the island's literary tradition. The level of racial and gender discrimination, however, is not limited to black Puerto Rican women. In her essay about Arthur Schomburg, J. Arroyo discusses how

Panafricanist intellectuals like Winston James (1996) misunderstands Schomburg. Arroyo argues that James fails to understand the degree of "subtle radicalism" in Schomburg when James uncritically compares him with other West Indians nationalists who lived in New York city at the same time. Arroyo observes that instead of acting and writing like many of his Caribbean contemporaries, Schomburg adopted a "Masonic" language, which was current in that period. This language, which was also commonly used by his West Indian peers was a way to "negotiate and represent" the nature of his transcultural identity (p. 97). In other words, by analyzing the experience of Schomburg, the author establishes that Schomburg's experience in New York was different from the rest of West Indians immigrants, and as such, it deserves a different treatment and analysis by highlighting his experience as a black Puerto Rican immigrant.

In Puerto Rico, racial discrimination takes place everyday in different spaces affecting both black Puerto Ricans and black immigrants to the island. Hernández Angueira ably discusses this phenomenon in his essay on Dominican immigrants to the island. In this instance, the racial discrimination experienced by Dominican women—as Hernández Angueira demonstrates—also extends to their gender. They face sexual discrimination as well. This formula also applies to black Puerto Rican women in all spaces and social levels. Franco Ortíz and Quiñones Hernández's essay suggests that in addition to their sexuality, black Puerto Rican women are perceived less respectable because of their "undesirable" physical appearance. In other words, their physical appearance and hairstyles place them as an out-group.

The role of black Puerto Ricans in the island's economic development has been addressed in conjunction to scholarly

work on slavery. Groundbreaking scholarship from the 1980s and 1990s (Scarano, Negron-Portillo, Nistal Moret, Baralt, and others) up to the present (Figueroa 2005), has established the significance of slave labor to Puerto Rico's economic development. Furthermore, the socioeconomic transformation experienced throughout the island's history is linked to the role of freed men and women who eventually became Puerto Rico's working class. In this sense, the organizational skill of this group and their contributions to the strengthening of labor unions serve as a constant reminder of the valuable relationship between social/class consciousness and race. The historiography on this topic is very rich, but the issue of racial and gender discrimination is rarely addressed, with the exception of Suárez Findley (1998). Apparently, the island's colonial situation played a key role on class formation and national identity. It is not surprising that during that process negative misconceptions of blackness crystallized into racial discourse and practice. Santiago Valle's essay revisits the topic, arguing that, in addition to the racial discrimination in the labor market, the working class, who were mostly black, became a target of racism. In addition, the racial and gender bifurcation is seen through the "sexualization" or objectification of black Puerto Rican women in the labor market.

The contributions of black Puerto Ricans to the process of modernization of the island must be addressed. One of the steps to make corrective measures, as the anthology beautifully demonstrates, is to deal with issues of race and gender discrimination. Merino Falú's essay shows that the limited opportunities that black Puerto Rican women have had in the labor market (e.g., educators, seamstress, domestic workers) continue to stigmatize and

alienate them from the society. Linked to their economic role is the social representation of black Puerto Ricans. Alegria Ortega's essay on the representation of blackness in Puerto Rican television reaffirms how the media becomes a vehicle perpetuating negative conceptions of black Puerto Ricans.

Contrapunto de género y raza opens and closes with a poem. Both poems, one by Rivera Lassén and the other by Santos Febres, remind us of how blessed the island of Puerto Rico is in relations to the presence of coherent communities of traditions and aspirations. The ideal

picture presented by the poets will remain a dream deferred in as long as the African factor is fully acknowledged. In general, the book calls for all Puerto Ricans both on the island and in the diaspora to unite and eradicate racial discrimination. It is imperative to continue the dialogue and exchange of ideas with regard to racial and gender issues for the good of the whole community. It is fair to conclude that *Contrapunto de género y raza* en Puerto Rico is providing a progressive and enlightening new approach in addressing critical social and cultural issues of the society.

Women, Creole Identity, and Intellectual Life in Early Twentieth-Century Puerto Rico.

By Magali Roy-Féquièrre

Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004 • 328 pages; \$24.95 [paper]

REVIEWER: ROSA E. CARRASQUILLO, College of the Holy Cross

In this feminist critique, Magali Roy-Féquièrre scrutinizes a sample of intellectual work that has defined what is known as the Generación del Treinta (the 1930s Generation), writers like Antonio S. Pedreira, Luis Palés Matos, Emilio S. Belaval and Margot Arce, who invested in defining the Puerto Rican nation in service of their class interests. Their “cultural nationalism” prescribed a hierarchical order where the white elite maintained their privileges over the mulatto working classes, and claimed direct links with Spain, its civilization and history. Roy-Féquièrre contextualizes historically this cultural nationalist project by referring to the hacienda world of the nineteenth century and the sweeping modernization of the twentieth; the criollo or white intellectual elite expressed a class anxiety over lost privileges and declining social status with the new colonial order. White

intellectuals somewhat exaggerated the idea that Hispanophilia intended to resist US imperialism in the cultural realm—ironically, by worshiping another form of colonialism. The Generación del Treinta also envisioned a stiff gender order where white men commanded over white and mulatto women. Thus, the nation “imagined” by the Generación del Treinta mostly sought to contain both women and the racially mixed working classes.

Rather than a monolithic enterprise, Roy-Féquièrre studies the 1930s cultural nationalism as the gathering of conflicting voices where intellectuals debated divergent aspects of the national project. Women, in particular, offered crucial insights to the conceptualization of the Puerto Rican nation. In fact, as Roy-Féquièrre demonstrates, women intellectuals of the period, such as Margot Arce, María Cadilla de Martínez, and Concha Meléndez, among others, were the pillars

of the Generación del Treinta. Trivialized and forgotten, their voices “are often treated not as part of the main story of that generation, but as asides that seem disconnected from the important events” (p. 36). A major contribution to the history of Puerto Rico and to cultural studies in general, Roy-Féquièrre places these women at the center of early twentieth-century history and intellectual life, and analyzes the contradictions and limitations of their elite feminism. In order to create a social space for themselves, elite women adhered to the international suffragist strategies and fought for voting rights for literate women only. Clearly, their social space excluded the great majority of women in Puerto Rico, where literacy rates in the early twentieth century were extremely low. Women intellectuals dialogued with elite white men, while silencing working-class women (chapter 2).

In addition, these women had to “acquire” a “universalistic” or “objective” tone that was devoid of gender identity if they were ever to claim intellectual authority. They had to project a “genderless professional persona” in order to enter the University of Puerto Rico, the Ateneo Puertorriqueño, and the Instituto de Literatura Puertorriqueña, institutional sites where the Generación del Treinta contested US colonialism and established a cultural field enabling them to imagine the Puerto Rican nation. Even as members of these institutions, women could not find acceptance in the most influential journal of the period, *Índice*, which represented “the masculine voice of cultural nationalism” (p. 83) and affirmed in its pages that “women had nothing to offer on Puerto Rican national identity or current affairs” (p.87). Women intellectuals opted for publishing their own journal, the *Revista de la Asociación de Mujeres Graduas de la Universidad de Puerto Rico*, which, instead of offering a feminist critique of the nation,

privileged high culture and Hispanophilia in the struggle against US imperialism, just like the male intelligentsia. Nonetheless, tuning their priorities with their male counterparts came at a cost because their participation in cultural nationalism was accepted “so long as they were willing to give up or minimize gender-based differences and agendas” (p. 198). They could not advance gender equality with the male intelligentsia because they did not want to risk class and racial prerogatives. Women believed in the “benefits” of adhering to whiteness and a Spanish legacy as much as men.

Privileging Spanish and white culture as the epitome of the Puerto Rican nation in a mulatto colony was only possible after some serious manipulation of history. As Roy-Féquièrre documents, the Generación del Treinta embarked on such a revisionist historical project by erasing any trace of violence in the history of Spanish colonialism in the Americas. The Spanish conquest, the genocide of Native Americans, and the pillage of land are concealed in a mystified drama that blamed Amerindians and Africans for their own exploitation. Slavery of both Amerindians and Africans was erased, and only entered the written word in the “realm of the unspeakable.” The 1930s intelligentsia emphasized the kindness of white masters/employers toward their slaves/employees, and naturalized sexual violence against black women with the myth of whitening or the cultural improvement of the working classes. Mixing of races, however, only benefited white men, who were culturally sanctioned to impregnate black women in fortuitous encounters; a privilege that, as shown in Emilio S. Belaval's short stories, not even modernization could take away (chapter 5). In emphasizing racial harmony, the Generación promoted the notion of racial heterogeneity where they, white intellectuals,