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Madera, Judith

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# Quiet Empire and Slippery Geography: Puerto Rico as Nonsovereign Territory

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JUDITH MADERA, Wake Forest University

Whatever the nature of Puerto Rico's relationship to the US might be, its territorial status is confusing. A national poll from as late as 2017 showed that nearly half of US adults did not recognize Puerto Ricans as fellow citizens.<sup>1</sup> This unawareness might be attributed to many things—among them a diminished sense of geographic awareness. Geography is not part of the general K-12 curriculum in US public schools. Students learn almost nothing about overseas territories; where places like Guam or American Samoa can be found on a map is a guess. Further, island territories do not have federal voting representation or even a voting representative in Congress, which makes them largely invisible as both electorates and places. As of 2020, the US controls Puerto Rico's economy, trade, public education system, transportation laws (including air and water traffic), its defense/military complex, and tax codes. Puerto Rico's meaning as a polity is literally determined offshore, and too often the complex relationships between sovereignty, discourse, and citizenship are lost in the relay between island and mainland.

Puerto Rico is an illegible space for so many US citizens, not merely because it is an island some one thousand miles from coastal Florida. Rather, the terms of its belonging are contingent, unclear, and attached to slippery formulations of location. As I will show, island illegibility is less about an impasse in political recognition than a feature of sociospatial asymmetry configured as nonsovereign national territory. Notably, the meaning of nonsovereign territory materialized in debates and legal decisions about geopolitical reach at the turn of the twentieth century when the US claimed the island archipelagos of Guam, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico from Spain in the Treaty

of Paris (1898). As a nonsovereign territory, Puerto Rico is subject to juridical constraints and economic policies that penalize it on the basis of location. In fact, for all archipelagic US territories, location is a feature by which territorial difference can be enforced. Locale has been used explicitly by the US Supreme Court as the justification for differential applications of the US Constitution toward its island-based citizens.

Location is a flexible concept, cutting across material sites and cartographic space. It is at once a relation between coordinates and the experience of living in a particular and networked place. Location also functions as a zone of influence for statist policy and production. Colonial historians from Michel-Rolph Trouillot to Vincent Brown have shown the ways maps imply territorial strategies—even when the state is not fixed as a form.<sup>2</sup> Territory is often presented as mapped, geographical fact. Geoeconomic and political borders are similarly equated with physical boundaries. But territory is a system that contains a story of development, and development reflects design—someone’s construction.

As I will argue, territorial geography is a discursive construct; it is produced through discourse. David Harvey describes discourses as “institutionally based, materially constrained, experientially grounded manifestations of social and power relations.”<sup>3</sup> Indeed, geography as naturalized representation can obscure discursive formations that do not peel back easily from the colonial disparities and divisions that manufacture them in the first place. For these reasons, this essay assesses the discursive geographies structuring Puerto Rico’s inclusion in the national republic. By discursive geographies, I do not mean an abstraction of material space or some closure of representation that is not attached to the real. Rather, place and description are mutually constitutive.

Territory invokes a structure, an interplay of rules and enforcements. But it is a structure replete with contradictions and inconsistencies. Many of these inconsistencies turn on discursive pressure points. For one thing, Puerto Rico’s territorial linkage to the US is a product of popular and legal discourses produced inside the United States. It has been fabricated from the blended accounts of Congress, the executive branch, national courts, and the narrative projections of academic historians—especially from within the Naval War College. Further, because so many questions surrounding Puerto Rico’s connection to the US have been buried under layers of misunderstanding and illegibility, it makes sense to clarify the scripts that first established the relationship. I will indicate how the legalistic contortions that configured Puerto Rico’s territorial status were formed by the Foraker Act, a federal law passed by Congress as the Organic Act of 1900. (The Foraker Act did not provide US citizenship for Puerto Ricans. Rather it established the framework for a colonial government that persists until this day.) I also consider the Insular Cases, a series of Supreme Court decisions beginning in 1901, which, along with the Jones-Shafroth Act, modified the Foraker Act. The Insular Cases reveal Puerto Rico’s statutory citizenship—or citizenship by an act of Congress, but not the US Constitution. Importantly, they evince the ways national rights can be drawn and withdrawn on the basis of location.

### Geostrategy for Quiet Empire

Discursive geographies—protean placemaking histories and projections—had a major role in US archipelagic territorialization. Prominent placeshaping narratives circulated through War Department reports, territorial legal prospects, and the surprisingly salable channels of the historical monograph. Such leading geographies provided a backstory for colonial enterprise, a flexible context for pursuing island territories as war concessions in the first place. They were scaffolded to visions for a new era, and they used the past to selectively fortify institutional control.

One important playbook for Puerto Rico's twentieth-century future was written by Alfred Thayer Mahan, US Navy captain, lead strategic advisor to President William McKinley, and president of the American Historical Association (AHA) in 1902. The intertwined disciplines of naval exercise and European naval history featured prominently in the theater of Mahan's career, and his path to the premier US historical studies organization was as unconventional as it was fortuitous. Mahan was appointed a lecturer in naval history at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island in 1885, and, in just one year's time, assumed presidency of the college. Much of his scholarly reputation rested on his book *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660–1783* (1890), which was read widely.<sup>4</sup> (It was translated into German, French, and Japanese, and it was purportedly used to pressure the German Reichstag to finance a surface fleet and support the First Navy Bill.)<sup>5</sup>

On the one hand, the backstory Mahan proffered for a twentieth-century US Navy was a cherry-picked version of Western imperialism, reinforced by denser expositions on tactical sailing operations. *The Influence of Sea Power's* conceit—that sea power was decisive for national security and economic welfare—was established early in the introduction and hearkened to the First Punic War and the exploits of Hannibal, the Carthaginian general. (Mahan also included brief and general chapters about France, Spain, and the Netherlands alongside his ostensible subject, British naval supremacy.) The historical arc he enlisted was arranged to support US naval expansion as a core requisite for political sovereignty and national defense. Expansionism, wrapped in a mobile plan for industrial-scale security, afforded Mahan considerable influence in military circles. *The Influence of Sea Power* provided a voice of surety in an uncertain but still agglomerative epoch: the New Imperialism in Africa and Asia. Of course, it helped that one of his most powerful advocates was Assistant Secretary of the Navy Theodore Roosevelt, the man who would succeed McKinley.

The kind of American archipelago envisioned by Mahan had the appearance of something the world had seen before. It resembled Britain's island empire—though on a smaller scale. Island chains would, in fact, be incorporated into US ownership according to geographical traditions of late British colonialism. And in Mahan's plan, islands functioned as stepping-stones for US military power and a means of gaining strategic access to international commercial markets. It is no coincidence that the US designated its island territories as major naval bases and military test zones: Cuba's

Guantánamo Bay, Hawai'i's Pearl Harbor, the massive Subic Naval Base in the Philippine Islands, Puerto Rico's archipelagos of Vieques and Culebra, and the more than one third of Guam that is occupied by US military installations were by design.

At the same time, Mahan's discursive geographies were underpinned by the braided operations of militarism and logistics. Fossil fuel access, supply chains, and telecommunications were the glue for establishing a nascent global power—one that was forged in the trials and failures of Western Europe. To this end, his analysis of Britain's cross-hatched deployment of merchant and combat fleets was cogent, especially insofar as it facilitated an imperialism of interlocked commercial and military interests. Describing a twentieth-century growth industry of management logistics at the intersection of military and civilian logistics, Deborah Cowen writes: "If logistics was a residual military art of the geopolitical state ... then logistics as a business science has come to drive geo-economic logics and authority."<sup>6</sup> The doubly enforced market-driven and military-powered territorialization framed by Cowen materialized as the very model the US would pursue (at Mahan's insistence) in the Caribbean and South Pacific. Puerto Rico was an opportunity—an opportunity among other opportunities—for a geographic ambit of naval bases to guard eastern access points to the Panama Canal. The island would be leveraged in the name of national security, and as a noncompetitive outlet for offshoring US economic production; goods would be priced higher than on the mainland.<sup>7</sup> Domestic industrial growth was the *realpolitik*, the context that gave logic to the territorial acquisition of Puerto Rico.

US imperialism (something Mahan was far less tentative about in doctrine and practice than McKinley) was covertly dependent on many of the same trappings of British imperialism. Certainly, offshore production, foreign labor procurement, and overseas warcraft deployment—the implements of a British-styled imperialism—would have been anathema to many Americans at the turn of the century. But popular opinion was malleable, and could be cued toward unlikely ends. Reports of Spanish atrocities against Cuban civilians reported regularly in lurid detail in Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* and William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal* proved incendiary.

### The Reach of Speech

Sensational news coverage from the turn-of-the-century yellow press is frequently credited with whipping up public sentiment in support of the Spanish-American War. Headlines and images certainly gave view to the extreme conditions of starving Cuban civilians, and brought a nearby island to wider US attention. But what is less examined are the ways print journalism shaped the political terms of island annexation by ostensibly denouncing colonial power and simultaneously recouping its territorial strategies for national interests. If we take discourse expansively as meaning-making work, or what Michel Foucault calls "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak," then it is possible to see the circulations of a *realpolitik* that exceeded anti-Spanish propaganda or yellow press amplification.<sup>8</sup> More pervasively,

media fashioned digestible forms of Empire. For example, in March 1898, a prominent editorial in Adolph Och's newly acquired *New York Times* (which Och carefully positioned as a disinterested and objective news outlet), weighed in on a debate about entangling alliances.<sup>9</sup> It spoke to the need to write a new American history for new times. The editorial argued that Thomas Jefferson's 1809 dictum in promotion of national isolationism need not be taken as dogma, but rather as a maxim for more nascent, or "feeble" times: "A national policy necessary in the early part of this century may become obsolete, even anachronistic, at the close of the century."<sup>10</sup>

An American empire required a history that was largely self-referential, and therefore grounded in its own exceptionalism. To effect this picture, colonialism was portrayed as corrupt and lascivious when foreign (Bourbon Spain's decaying empire), but with modern and civilizing potential when domesticated. Colonialism as a political system was even naturalized as part of an enduring national tradition moderated by the US. In March 1899, *The Atlantic Monthly* made a curative diagnosis for US history—and more remarkably, pronounced the US to be "the republican branch of the English family ... who taught Great Britain a lesson in colonial methods that has done much toward the successful building of her empire, and that has improved the manners of wise home governments toward colonies ever since."<sup>11</sup> The editorial went further, reconditioning the meaning of empire for a US readership as a *moral obligation* of a sovereign and secure nation. It surmised that "the conception of a colony has radically changed with the spread of democratic ideas. It had one meaning in the early days of British authority in India, and it has another meaning in these days of British authority in Egypt. It may be our good fortune still further to humanize and to soften this meaning, until it come to signify only help toward free government."<sup>12</sup> What the pathway to free governance would look like was yet to be determined. But the need for reclaiming colonial administration as democratic practice pivoted to a new geopolitics that in many ways was not particularly new.

In any case, US imperialism as foreign policy was already fermenting in the ranks of academia. It could be made more inevitable-seeming and actionable through an ethos of "land's end," or the idea of essential spaces of opportunity for American industry. Though Mahan's narrative purchase tied explicitly to the same US Naval War College that in 1894 planned a war with Spain (which the US instigated by a self-detonating explosion aboard the *USS Maine* in Havana Harbor), he was not a singular actor. His political stance was well within the bounds of liberal academic thought. A core presumption underlying the naval college's efforts was effectively extended in the highly influential arguments of Frederick Jackson Turner. In "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893), Turner famously argued that the western frontier, the forging grounds of the American character, had closed. He wrote:

Since the days when the fleet of Columbus sailed into the waters of the New World, America has been another name for opportunity, and the people of the United States have taken

their tone from the incessant expansion which has not only been open but has even been forced upon them. He would be a rash prophet who should assert that the expansive character of American life has now entirely ceased. Movement has been its dominant fact, and, unless this training has no effect upon a people, the American energy will continually demand a wider field for its exercise.<sup>13</sup>

The “wider field” that “American energy” demanded would not presumably be the closed and bounded form of the contiguous states; this much was pronounced as self-evident. The field to which Turner referred could really be many things, though the geographic imperative for expansion was the most suggestive. A global climate for territorial expansion was impossible to ignore. US political and military agendas were not isolated from events after the Berlin Conference (1884–1885), which involved the outrageous redrawing of Africa by European powers without real reference to living human communities and ecologies that predated this massive land grab. New Imperialism’s civilizing mission was already being pedaled in print—even as the massive death tolls, displacements and genocides it spawned were coming to light piecemeal in the US.

In some ways, archipelagic territorialization was another variant of neocolonialism in an epoch of land grabs and imperialist propaganda. It had certain differences from late settler colonialism, but also what Alyosha Goldstein describes as “sometimes mutually constitutive and sometimes conspicuously disjointed formations.”<sup>14</sup> Like settler colonialism, it dispossessed residents of land and property through military seizures, predatory bank foreclosures, and tax-enabled monopolies on natural resources and agriculture, (something the sugar trusts I discuss shortly will illustrate). At the same time, US colonial strategies were largely unreadable to a continental US public, mainly because they were designed to be unreadable. Where Spain’s former island possessions were even located—and in what oceans—was not part of a common national knowledge. Little administrative advantage could be gained by publicizing data about the military or commercial installations that enforced territorial relationships far more than geographical proximity. US colonialism favored the logistics of what Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel calls “the archipelago (both as a system of islands, ports, and centers of production and as the sea that connects them).”<sup>15</sup> As networks, archipelagoes could be obscured as territorial possessions. The network links for maintaining command of sea routes and shipping traffic were not designed to be legible to just anybody—and certainly not island residents.

Geostrategically, Puerto Rico was much closer to the US mainland—and Western Europe for that matter—than the new Pacific possessions. But its water-defined boundaries and insular form did not facilitate population overhaul in the form of an influx of white Anglo-Saxon settlers. It was already densely populated and its people could not be pushed back continentally, as had happened in the southwestern

territorial acquisitions from Mexico. The War Department *Annual Report* (1900) claimed: “The Porto Ricans cannot be absorbed through the immigration of Americans, for the country is already more densely populated than India or any State of the Union, and there is no room for any large influx of outsiders from anywhere.”<sup>16</sup> Island-scaled agriculture and mountainous terrain were unlikely to attract investors seeking acreage, something the federal government’s Homestead Acts in the early twentieth century promoted in the Great Plains and western states. Puerto Rico would not be territorialized as a site of US residency but instead be scaled as the nation’s “wider field.” As such, it could largely be kept out of sight, zoned at the watery crossroads of the foreign and domestic.

### **Racialization and Naturalization**

Territorial policies further ensured that the island would remain largely unreadable to the metropole, and distance from the mainland helped ensure quiet. To secure the installation of quiet empire, the military governorships of Guy Vernor Henry and George Davis severely curbed the island’s freedom of the press, especially when it came to criticism of the military—or to Puerto Rican commentary about US interventions in Cuba. Such restrictions caused real conflict between newspapers and the provisional government.<sup>17</sup> Beyond shutting down avenues for free speech, the new administration denied Puerto Ricans the ballot. Voter suppression in archipelagic territories was directly influenced by homeland tactics used on Black and Indigenous people. To implement non-sovereignty, the US War Department Report of 1900 had to look no further than to contemporary settler colonial procedure: “If universal or manhood suffrage be given to the Porto Ricans bad results are almost certain to follow. The vast majority of the people are no more fit to take part in self-government than are our reservation Indians, from whom the suffrage is withheld unless they pay taxes.”<sup>18</sup> Island quietude could thus be safeguarded by already tested interior policies of disenfranchisement, deployed to make Indigenous peoples legal outsiders to the state.

Puerto Rico came into national purview through a quiet colonialism that was never nested in one clear authority, whether it be the federal government, Congress, or the US military. The island did not fold back into nation, but was instead coded as a kind of suspended space that required enculturation into a proper body politic. Appealing to this kind of provisional spatiality (cast as a temporality and historical underdevelopment), Elihu Root, the forty-first US Secretary of War, authored the federal Foraker Act and designed the governmental structure of Puerto Rico. Root would later become Secretary of State and win the Nobel Peace Prize of 1912 for his work in foreign diplomacy and world affairs. In 1899, he wrote:

Before the people of Porto Rico can be fully intrusted with self-government they must first learn the lesson of self-control and respect . . . . It would be of no use to present the people of Porto Rico now a written constitution or frame of laws, however



perfect, and tell them to live under it. They would inevitably fail without a course of tuition under a strong and guiding hand.<sup>19</sup>

Much like the Philippines, Puerto Rico was politicized as an island left behind in time. Its spatial difference was manipulated into a kind of historical underdevelopment. The late geographer Doreen Massey describes this process—attached to early modern European colonial expansionism—as one of “convening” a temporality: “In brief, spatial difference was convened into temporal sequence. Different ‘places’ were interpreted as different stages in a single temporal development.”<sup>20</sup> Puerto Rico’s heterogeneous history, shaped by colonization, creolization, and centuries of Atlantic circuitry between Africa, Europe, and the Americas thus became defined in legal discourse as narrow, island-based tradition. Islands could be reduced to what Lanny Thompson describes as discrete isolates instead of “relational spaces of archipelagoes ... constituted through connections with other islands, both near and far, and with continental territories, both national and imperial.”<sup>21</sup> Puerto Ricans, by this logic, were simply not ready for sovereignty.

As part of a new story that could be supported by a new geography, Puerto Rico’s official name was changed in 1898 for legislative and commercial purposes to “Porto Rico.” Overwriting a name that the island identified as its own for some four hundred years with an altered phonetic version reads as a small gesture. But in combination with the English-language campaigns that would be enforced in the first decades of US rule—and with special zeal by US-appointed governors such as Emmet Montgomery Reily, a Missouri-based politician appointed by President Warren Harding in 1921, or his more brutal successor Blanton Winship—it signified that the archipelago’s transactional meaning was generated by the US.<sup>22</sup> Modernity would be meted out on anglophone terms.

While suppositions of island inefficiency crystalized in different letters, memos, and deliberations within the McKinley administration, cartoon depictions of US occupation gave further view to incorporative tensions in the new territories. Uncle Sam cartoons from the turn of the twentieth century (especially c. 1898–1900) reveal a great deal visually and semiotically about America’s self-propagated paternalism toward Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and its newly taken archipelagoes, including Hawai‘i. Depictions of childlike and uneducated island Natives in need of Uncle Sam’s tutelage were especially pervasive in leading turn-of-the-century humor magazines like *Judge* and *Puck*, which, in turn, circulated more broadly through national newspapers and journals. Caricature amplified visual representations of difference and was a pliable shorthand for contending with racial disparity and dominant white power. It was also a legible surface for an agglomerative geopolitics that blotted out notions of community complexity and of networked island histories. Differences between island populations in the Atlantic and Pacific were frequently truncated, and diverse island populations collectively took shape as half-clothed, primitive supplicants in need of US patronage. The cartoons brought territorial residents of the Atlantic and Pacific into a

nationalist net as understudies of Uncle Sam. In many cases, they gave casual cover to messier issues like the legal status of territory and modern state alliances.

Baked into a unifying mythos of national citizenship—at least as envisioned by policymakers and pundits—was the notion of a cohesive continental form that could absolve difference by conferring order. In cartoons, islands frequently appear as stepping-stones in the water for the long strides of Uncle Sam—a fitting visual analogue for the geospatial vision of the Naval War College. The visual images expose a tactical assumption of island subjection. Island geographies were outlying backdrops against which the modern state actualized its centralized and bordered form. What is more, it fell to an indivisible nation to carry its backward outposts into modern practices with education and enlightenment. (Uncle Sam was often depicted as a school-teacher and book bearer.) Such kinds of civilizing credos appeared time and again in the epoch of New Imperialism, and the spatial optics of territory especially resonated in print circulars.

Not altogether surprisingly, McKinley's administrative efforts were not swallowed wholesale by many prominent Americans, including former president Grover Cleveland and an array of vice presidents, who joined ranks in the American Anti-Imperialist League in 1898. Boston served as the epicenter for the movement, but with strong and competing chapters from Chicago, New York, and Washington, DC. Humorists like Mark Twain also pushed back against US territorial expansionism, with Twain announcing his support for anti-imperialists in 1898 in the pages of the *New York Tribune*, *New York Times*, and *New York World*. He described the Treaty of Paris as a cloaked document that protected European clergy and not the islanders their administrations tyrannized.<sup>23</sup> Twain's "To the Person Sitting in Darkness," published both in the *North American Review* in 1901 and by the New York Anti-Imperialist League that same year, satirized the new imperial navigators, the United States. It critiqued the US co-option of a people's hard-fought revolution in the Philippines as well as the massive bloodshed and heedless destruction caused by occupation.<sup>24</sup> Anti-imperialism was a wide net, and it certainly included the ranks of US-Americans who were far from enthusiastic about the potential influx of colored populations from distant places. It could level with xenophobic nationalism or with the progressive populism of McKinley's presidential challenger, the Democrat William Jennings Bryan. Still, anti-imperialism's reach did not rival the massive spatial deployments of imperialism.

It appears at once brazen and insular to tout a fraught national form in popular media as the guarantor of programmatic civil rights—especially in an era that would give rise to local and state Jim Crow statutes, race-based segregation, and the collapse of Reconstruction. Yet the conceit of a unifying nation was both defined and constructed repeatedly through official networks.<sup>25</sup> It assumed a looming geographic shape in "The Administration of the Island Possessions," Theodore Roosevelt's 1902 address, which characterized US territorial administration in "the Occident," as distinct from the Isthmian Canal intervention region and from the Philippines. The latter sites were the realm of "questions of policy coming without its own borders."<sup>26</sup> Policy, to

be sure, would be generated from within. Roosevelt's discursive framework depended on an extensible national purview that made no concessions for island sovereignty. It also subordinated traditional (Westphalian) demarcated territorial boundary lines to the reach and application of a new geography. Praising the efficient political occupation of Puerto Rico's government, Roosevelt stated that by "choosing our men down there—governor, treasurer, attorney-general, judges, superintendent of education—every one," the US was "acting in good faith." He also argued: "We have not been frightened or misled into giving to the people of the island a form of government unsuitable to them. While providing that the people should govern themselves as far as possible, we have not hesitated in their own interests to keep the power of shaping their destiny."<sup>27</sup>

Roosevelt's speech exposed a geographical standpoint rooted in Anglo privilege. It imagined itself as metropolitan, modern, and existing outside of economically striated island spaces. By contrast, Puerto Ricans were characterized as moored in a spatiality they were not evolved enough to govern. To wit, Anglo supremacy was spatially ascendant and administrative. It controlled otherness by corralling it into categories that took on meaning in relation to the sovereign state. The state could impose due governance or disenfranchisement. It did both. What it would not do was preserve archipelagic place histories—and why would it? There was little incentive to recognize histories that did not match the economic zoning interests of major metropolises and mainland states.

### Lost Histories of the Interspace

Still, in the gap between anti-imperialism and the fledgling (yet evasive) US imperialism supported by McKinley, his War College successor Roosevelt, the sugar lobbies, and the US Supreme Court—were quantities of lost knowledge. Largescale temporal and spatial histories of America's territories were not translated into US jurisdictions (the relationship of law to land). The core illegibility that still defines the relationship between the US and its island territories is conditioned by a lack of these knowledges. Places are shaped through site-based memories and cultural circulations. They are affective, social, and networked. Arguably, a defining part of a place's meaning is generated by its relationship to other places. As Doreen Massey reminded us, places are "differentially located within wider power-geometries."<sup>28</sup> Yet, islands were configured as peripheral points in state policy. They were acquired for the enrichment of specific businesses and industries and were territorialized without reference to existing archipelagic circuitries that predated US control.

For example, Black and Brown abolitionism has not been a regularly recognized feature of Puerto Rico's identity as a US territory, yet it was the centerpiece of the nineteenth-century Puerto Rican independence movement. Like other radical abolition campaigns in the Caribbean (Antigua, Barbuda, Grenada), Puerto Rican abolition was a movement of the interspace. That is, it was not contained inside the subscribed

boundaries of Spanish colonial authority, but instead was shaped in the networked space shared between islands. The first and most important demand of the Puerto Rico Independence Movement, the abolition of slavery, a demand issued in “The Ten Commandments of Free Men,” (November 1867), was written from the nearby Danish-owned island of St. Thomas, where slavery had already been abolished. So although it is often (still) believed that the US liberated Puerto Rico from its colonial oppressor when it invaded in 1898, it did not—or at least not in respect to Puerto Rican revolutionary aims. The abolition mandate was finally granted by Spain in 1873—only after multiple revolts and a bloody Puerto Rican uprising, *El Grito de Lares* (The Cry of Lares).

But what is often written out of US historical accounts is that one year prior to the US invasion of 1898, Spain finally granted self-government and constitutional autonomy to Puerto Rico with the “Carta Autonómica” of November 25, 1897. The first elections exercising this new right to self-government were held in March 1898. However, constitutional autonomy never arrived. It was effectively intercepted by the US naval campaign in May 1898 and wiped out in the armistice that followed. This signal distinction did not have a foothold in the new political order. Instead, the missing mandate for self-government became an item line in a wider struggle for legibility and meaning.

Whole lifecycles of history have been lost to the long-term destruction of colonialism, especially the stories and languages of enslaved and Indigenous peoples from both sides of the Atlantic. Preserving a conquered people’s memories can hardly be expected from an imposed government or an extractive economic agenda. Moreover, in an Antilles region already shaped by seasonal hurricanes and seismic systems, territory is a demarcation on unstable grounds. Puerto Ricans could not have anticipated the US invasion of July 1898. But neither the occupiers nor the occupied could have known that just weeks later the island would be struck by the deadliest hurricane in modern history, San Ciriaco (1899). San Ciriaco was the longest-lived Atlantic hurricane recorded. It brought 28 days of rain and devastation and killed thousands—many from drownings. One quarter of the entire population of Puerto Rico was made homeless.<sup>29</sup>

That San Ciriaco cut a similar path across Puerto Rico as Hurricane María in 2017 (traveling from the southeast to the northwest) is worth noting insofar as the story of US territorialization reveals a trail of wreckage in the hollows of an earlier Spanish expropriation.<sup>30</sup> San Ciriaco exposed the island’s fraught colonial composition: its agricultural system designed for export, its insufficient infrastructure, thin communications, and especially poor health services. The hurricane particularly devastated the island’s major city in the South, Ponce, a center of coffee manufacturing (hulling and drying), tobacco, sugar, chocolate, and trade. The loss of agriculture, houses and livelihoods on the island constituted a profound leveling—and a grounds upon which new land policies could be enacted. In the immediate aftermath, the resonance of Neil Smith’s post-Hurricane Katrina formulation of “unnatural disaster” over a century later is striking: “In every phase and aspect of a disaster—causes, vulnerability, preparedness,

results and response, and reconstruction—the contours of disaster and the difference between who lives and who dies is to a greater or lesser extent a social calculus.”<sup>31</sup>

As it wiped out extant structures, especially in the coffee and sugar manufacturing regions of the south, the hurricane exposed something further: the ways territorial logistics, the managed movement of goods and resource distribution, would reshape territory. Logistical territory could penetrate the island’s connective tissue in a way that settler colonialism could not. Logistics was the calculus that determined the distribution of aid. It would not go to those most in need like laborers, farmers, artisans, or nearly anybody impacted firsthand by the hurricane. This was evidenced by the ways Congress denied relief for Ciriaco’s homeless. In fact, it would be ordinary US citizens who provided monetary assistance by way of an extraordinary charity campaign. Stuart Schwartz, who calls San Ciriaco “the midwife” of Puerto Rico’s birth as a US territory, describes the logic supporting distribution: “There was a deep fear among the military governors and the coffee and sugar planters on the island that public assistance to the indigent and homeless would turn the working class into beggars, because the islanders were ‘a people whose every tendency is in that direction.’”<sup>32</sup> Relief was thus distributed to planters, who disbursed it on the contractual condition that it would be detracted from standard wages. By concentrating aid in the sugar sector while simultaneously driving down wages for sugar workers, the United States, at least indirectly, melded opportunity to disaster, and shaped the groundwork for the model of sugar imperialism it would build in the decades that followed. Workers were even more dependent (contractually bound) to the sugar industry. Sugar would, in turn, drive the dominant ecology that the Foraker Act forged across Puerto Rico’s natural and human ecologies.

### **Territory Forged by Commodity**

If the hurricane was the midwife for US territorialization, the birth certificate was the Foraker Act, also called the *Organic Act of 1900*. For turn-of-the-century Puerto Rico, the Foraker Act rewired agricultural communities in a way that intensified inequities already in place. It was sponsored by Ohio Senator Joseph Foraker and signed into law by President McKinley. Nothing about the Foraker Act was about or apportioned to disaster relief. The act was actually quite predatory in that it opportunistically transitioned from estate agriculture to a commercial plantation system.

In brief, one of the significant impacts of US twentieth-century territorialization was the institutionalization of a new agricultural geography and a new spatialization of the island’s food system.<sup>33</sup> The US replaced coffee from the *cordillera central*, the central mountain highland region, as the island’s chief export crop with coastal sugar. Coffee growers were driven to financial ruin. (Like most island agricultural yield, Puerto Rico’s coffee could not be produced in the same bulk quantity as Brazil’s or Columbia’s, with whom the US had more lucrative contracts.) The Foraker Act also removed

cultivation from the cooler mountain regions to the hot coastal plains, where the raw material of sugar was milled and shipped. With the island effectively devastated by San Ciriaco and property substantially devalued, the majority of Puerto Rican farmers were in serious trouble. During recovery most lost their land to the American Colonial Bank, the largest on the island. Thousands of rural families were dispossessed and forced into sugar sharecropping. They were precisely the homespun labor pool that big sugar needed, instead of having to draw in migrant workers like other Caribbean islands. (It is worth adding that even as late as the mid-twentieth century, Hawai'i, which the US seized earlier in 1893, had to rely heavily on migrant workers from the Philippines, China, Japan, and Portugal to maintain its plantation economy.)

Sugar was not new in Puerto Rico. It was by far the most important commodity in the Caribbean from the seventeenth century to the twentieth. More than moving transnational supply chains and cultures, it spawned whole New World ecosystems. Colonial sugar brought about the widespread eradication of Indigenous peoples. It was the leading commodity of the transatlantic slave trade, and it put Caribbean plantations at the very center of New World human traffic for four centuries. But the US is rarely recognized for its place in a long Caribbean genealogy of New World slavery and colonialism. Enshrined in the Declaration of Independence as a keystone of anticolonial republicanism was the well-known credo that a valid government depended on the consent of the governed, and that governments not based on such consent could justifiably be overthrown. Executive ambitions for a colonial archipelago in the footprint of Britain's Royal Navy notwithstanding, sugar was the signature commodity of slippery empire, or an empire that preferred to remain illegible. Discussing Puerto Rico, the late Caribbean historian Sidney Mintz claimed in 2010: "It is clearly not that the United States dislikes having and using power. But apparently it has no appetite for acknowledging in a public, hence more responsible, way the contradictions implicit in frankly colonial rule."<sup>34</sup>

Caribbean sugar brought great wealth to Spain (beginning in the sixteenth century), England (especially in the eighteenth century), and France (prior to the signal uprisings in St. Domingue that produced Haiti). By the nineteenth century, colonial Cuba was the leading producer of sugar. Puerto Rico's industry was far less concentrated or productive. However, US colonization forged the sugar monoculture on the island on a twentieth-century scale. César Ayala describes the highly centralized scale of the American Sugar Kingdom with an example from the Guánica mill of the South Porto Rico Sugar Company that "produced more sugar in one year than all the combined sugar mills of Puerto Rico in any year of the 19th century. That is, the annual capacity of this sugar mill was more than that of all the *ingenios* of the slavery epoch, or even of the larger mills that existed between emancipation (1873) and the Spanish-American War (1898)."<sup>35</sup> All told, Puerto Rico came late to being a leading exporter of sugar. Yet the US can veritably be added to the list of colonial sugar empires in the Caribbean—even if it did not readily care to be perceived as a world-scale colonizer—or even acknowledge its own position nationally.

The overhaul of the island's food system also points to the ways discourses about territory as a political or legal designation too often fail to account for territory's impact on physical geographies and ecology. In the case of Puerto Rico, the impact of territory was registered environmentally. Previous land use (under an ineffectively administered nineteenth-century Spanish colonialism) had been dedicated to major crops of coffee, tobacco, and sugarcane, as well as rice, root crops, nuts, and a wide array of vegetables and fruits—many sold to European markets. Yet, the story of US territorialization in Puerto Rico is explicitly tied to monocrop production and export. After San Ciriaco, the US reorganized agriculture in a way that concentrated vulnerability, both ecologically and economically. To be sure, large-scale plantation and estate-based agriculture were traditionally the dominant systems in the Caribbean. In the case of Puerto Rico, it just came about later—and it came about through the expropriation of small landowners, which created a growing landless population where the major source of employment for coastal Puerto Ricans was cane-cutting.

Monocultural production further destabilized traditional agriculture and the livelihoods it long provided. Monoculture fostered an endemic food dependency and an import-driven food system (upwards of eighty percent in the last several years). On an island with a year-round growing season and fertile growing conditions, the reliance on imported food and fuel defies sustainability. The consequences of sugar monocultures are plainly recognized in the Caribbean, and especially in Cuba and Puerto Rico, where the US-run industry persisted later than in competing islands. These impacts include deforestation, soil erosion, fertilizer pollution, invasive plants, and the disappearance of native species.<sup>36</sup>

Imperial sugar as a system of controlled material circulation and, to a lesser extent, short-term land management, touched on nearly all implementations of the Foraker Act. With the act came a new form of government, again designed by Elihu Root. It consisted of a two-house legislature with an upper chamber to be selected in the United States. Local legislative powers were comprised of a legislative assembly and an executive council of eleven members; no more than five could be Puerto Rican. They could never hold the majority. All laws passed by Puerto Rico's legislative assembly would need to be approved by US Congress, and Congress could annul any laws as well. Puerto Ricans were effectively rendered voiceless—by design—in this political body whose head was a US-appointed civilian governor: Charles Herbert Allen, former Assistant Secretary of the Navy under McKinley, and Massachusetts prison commissioner for one year (1897–1898).

The government that erected itself as Porto Rican was hardly representative of island residents or their interests. But that point was felt secondarily to the impact of the currency exchange it mandated. Effective immediately, the Foraker Act devalued the island's Spanish currency by approximately forty percent and replaced it with the US dollar.<sup>37</sup> With spending power nearly halved and debts outscaling property—especially after the widespread devastation of San Ciricao—Puerto Rico's relative poverty climbed. The Foraker Act, and later the Hollander Act of 1901, named after Jacob Hollander,

professor of finance at Johns Hopkins University who doubled as Puerto Rico's treasurer in 1900, fortified the island's dependency on the US by prohibiting it from negotiating trade treaties and setting import and export regulations; it was thus dependent on US trade terms and US products at the expense of its own homegrown industries, present or future.<sup>38</sup>

Territory's advantages would be reaped by management in the form of an expanded material base for agricultural production. But since island spaces were limited, crowded, and generally taken as unfit for US settlement, the greater financial returns for profiteers had far less to do with fixing territory in a bordered form than with interstate circulation and Caribbean supply chain economics. Maritime logistics could be outsourced to the military sector in the name of international security. Allen, as governor and chief executive officer of Puerto Rico, would opportunize the pipeline put in place by the Navy, using military logistics and corporate management to his private advantage.

Allen's governorship showcased the ways a political appointment in one of the new US territories could invert the functions of the public and private sector and make public service a proposition for private ownership. That is, Allen used his governorship to expressly achieve a majority of voting shares in a monopoly that controlled the island's overall economy. The process was fast-tracked by the ad hoc implementation of Puerto Rico's new official government. Allen drafted what Nelson Denis aptly describes as "a business plan" for Puerto Rico, unloading the costs of his administration on island residents, many still homeless, through a new rollout of taxes.<sup>39</sup> While refusing local agricultural, municipal, and small business loans, Allen's administration issued no-bid contracts for mass-scale US sugar plantations and subsidies to US transportation companies, including railroads that connected shipping points. In doing so, the new administration shaped a logistical geography in the expanded borders of Atlantic national space. Allen's government accorded little attention to issues affecting the population since its objectives were vested elsewhere. Resigning his post after just one year, he returned to the US to form the American Sugar Refining Company, one of the twelve original publicly traded companies of the Dow Jones Industrial Average. The company controlled nearly all sugar processing in the US and was by 1907 the largest sugar syndicate in the world. It would later be renamed Domino Sugar. In brief, sugar shaped the island's economy, mobile systems, and government.

### **Island Circuitry**

In the same way that Puerto Rican political gains were not preserved in the English-language territorial transition, inter-Caribbean circulation corridors that supplied much of the island's unofficial economy closed up after US takeover. Twentieth-century territorial policy effectively eliminated many interisland trade and communication webs that predated even the US's declared independence from Britain at the end of the eighteenth century. Coastal and intra-Caribbean trade were major life staples for Puerto



Rico. Its fortified deepwater port in San Juan was the center of Spanish trade and military systems. But colonial control was less concentrated elsewhere, particularly because Spain invested remarkably little in Puerto Rican infrastructure, sanitation, education, healthcare, or the public sector more generally.

Throughout much of its history since Spanish conquest, Puerto Rico's largely informal economy survived through unsanctioned trade. To the south of the island were natural, protected harbors like Guayanilla, and the port of Arroyo, where coastal trade flourished and where Samuel Morse personally constructed a telegraph short line. Ponce, too, was a busy port for coffee and sugar, and a black-market Caribbean capital since the early 1600s. In addition, Puerto Rico was situated at the mouth of the Eastern Antilles, and directly east of the Isla de Mona and what is now the Dominican Republic—prime sites along cargo transport routes. Piracy was a significant sector of Puerto Rico's economy.

The most porous boundaries were water-based, and despite imperial rivalries, maritime marronage was pervasive between Puerto Rico and the Dutch Antilles, extending to polyglot islands like St. Eustatius and Saba. Multiple, unofficial maritime networks transected the island's coastlines. The Danish-owned island of St. Thomas, just 40 miles east of Vieques, where nineteenth-century radical Puerto Rican abolitionism was declared by exiled nationalists, was a hub of circum-island traffic and smuggling. (Today, it is called the gateway isle to the US Virgin Islands.) So pervasive were multiracial mariners and merchants in Puerto Rico's coastal communities that Spain's nineteenth-century *cédula de gracias*, a legal order approved by the Spanish Crown, extended concessions for freer trade. It was a move aimed to stall imminent revolts and maintain Spanish control during the Napoleonic Wars, which had already reached South America. Though foreign trade was hardly facilitated by Spanish law, in a practical sense it was tolerated in the colony.

However, following the US invasion of 1898 and the imposition of a military government, intra-island trade was tightly suppressed. US-controlled sugar infrastructure was dependent on key transportation corridors between Cuba, Puerto Rico, and coastal nodes that extended to the processing hub of New York City. Meanwhile, Puerto Ricans lost access to European markets. And though geographically closer than the continental US to Africa and South America, island residents were sequestered by US logistics. Even today, Puerto Rico is still subject to World War I-era cabotage laws, like Section 27 of the federal Merchant Marine Act of 1920 (known as the Jones Act). The Jones Act requires all shipped goods arriving in Puerto Rico to be transported on ships built, owned, and operated by the US. It subjects any foreign ship entering Puerto Rico to penalizing and costly tariffs, taxes, and fees; and it passes on the additional rerouting charges to Puerto Rican consumers. The expensive and environmentally profligate trade route ordinances are registered by residents of Puerto Rico as real material costs. Though invisible to many outside the archipelago, the ordinances are

contour lines for commercial enclosures that operate under the aegis of national security. Logistical trails are typically absent from georepresentative maps, but they make territory, and can shape it from the outside in.

### The Insular Cases and Locational Citizenship

The last points I will discuss concern interpretive legal frameworks that maintain geographical nebulosity for US territories. If the Foraker Act created a political structure that could not be considered representative, it was the Insular Cases that provided the legal sustenance for the overall economic circulation that continues to define life in the unorganized territory of Puerto Rico. The Insular Cases were a series of US Supreme Court decisions, beginning in 1901 and extending until the contemporary era, which have determined the relationship between the US and its island territories. Their impact has contributed to the Puerto Rican diaspora in the United States, since economically, politically, and legally—for as long as they remain residents of Puerto Rico—Puerto Ricans are burdened by excess costs and deprived of rights obtainable on the mainland. The Insular Cases thus reveal the nontransferability of national citizens' rights, which can be extended or withdrawn on the basis of location.

The Insular Cases were controversial from the start. They were first defined by the same court that decided *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, which promoted a legal doctrine of “separate but equal,” in order to constitutionally uphold racial segregation.<sup>40</sup> Separate but equal gave cover to Black disenfranchisement. It is commonly recognized as a way to legitimize racial discrimination in economic, educational, municipal, and public health matters. Yet, one difference between the Insular Cases and *Plessy* is that the latter was overturned by *Brown v. Board of Education*.<sup>41</sup> There would be no *Brown v. Board of Education*, however, for the Insular Cases since they were underwritten by a different compact of citizenship. Juan R. Torruella, formerly chief judge of the US First Circuit Court of Appeals, has called the Insular Cases a form of political apartheid, describing their legal framework as having “lasting and deleterious effects on a substantial minority of citizens.”<sup>42</sup>

The political segregation Torruella identifies was shaped by biased legislation and economic regulations, specifically assigned to residents of Puerto Rico. It is a feature of US territorialization that encompasses political occupation and unincorporation. In some respects, it has little in common with intrastate forms of apartheid like those operating in today's Israeli-occupied West Bank or in Apartheid-era South Africa insofar as it is not an ethnoracial classificatory scheme designed to directly segregate residences, infrastructures, and public utilities in what would otherwise be shared sites of residence. Instead US policy is enacted on an interstate capacity, and it separates the island from the mainland by, among other means, subjecting its territorial citizens to different (and disadvantageous) tax schemes.

Given the substantive ties between US territorialization and commodity-driven colonialism, it is fitting that the first Insular Case involved the commercial shipment of

Puerto Rican produce. *Downes v. Bidwell* (1901) began as a case about whether shipments of fruit from Puerto Rico to New York were interstate or international. The case was significant because it forced the Supreme Court to confront a feature of the Foraker Act: Puerto Rico was a US territory but the US still levied customs specifically on imports from Puerto Rico as though it were a foreign entity. The broader question under deliberation for the Supreme Court then was whether the US Constitution's revenue clauses extended to territories. (US customs imposed a duty on Puerto Rican fruits brought into the US, ostensibly violating Article 1, Section 8, clause 1 of the Constitution, which states that "all duties, imposts, and excises shall be uniform throughout the United States.") The Supreme Court ultimately ruled 5–4 that newly annexed territories (including Guam and the Philippines) were not entitled to the full guarantee of Constitutional rights in matters of imposed revenues and administration. In the words of Supreme Court Justice Edward D. White, "while in an international sense Porto Rico was not a foreign country, since it was subject to the sovereignty of and was owned by the United States, *it was foreign to the United States in a domestic sense*, because the island had not been incorporated into the United States, but was merely appurtenant thereto as a possession."<sup>43</sup>

In setting the precedent that the islands were "foreign in a domestic sense," the ruling put into motion a confounding logic that could support entirely different, economy-shaping tax codes for territorial application as well as a wide margin of ambiguity for lower courts when contending with territories. Further, whatever the concoction of "territorial non-incorporation" meant at the beginning of the twentieth century is still ambiguous in the twenty-first. Agential problems packed into the subject-object relationship do not stop at semantics. White's formulation of territory made it into something that could seemingly be held indefinitely, as a proprietor sees fit. The taxation inequities from 1901 that were first used to subsidize a US-owned sugar industry are perpetuated to this day.

For example, the 2017 Republican Tax Cuts and Jobs Act passed by Congress exploits the territorial difference in matters of taxation by requiring an excise tax on imports from Puerto Rico (goods that come into the US). The bill also taxes US companies operating in Puerto Rico at a higher rate than those operating domestically (in mainland US) and imposes a 12.5 percent tax on intellectual property income such as patents made by US companies in Puerto Rico.<sup>44</sup> Its timing, on the heels of a major hurricane-induced humanitarian crisis and massive population exodus, bears parallels to the Charles Allen/sugar trust tax rollout at the beginning of the twentieth century. But most expressly, the Insular Cases show how a US territory can be treated as a foreign jurisdiction in respect to taxes and tariffs, making Puerto Rico a slippery zone that is not domestic, yet contracted by the bounds of citizenship. If Puerto Ricans are US citizens, then they are subject to discriminatory policies as long as they are residents of Puerto Rico. By maintaining that Puerto Rico was at once domestic but also foreign, the Supreme Court simultaneously protected the island's trade status as an

outlet for US economic interests, and blocked the island from leveraging its own production for self-profit in ways that did not first benefit the United States.

From the position of establishing a legal substructure for policies with clear economic manifestations, the Supreme Court relied on a slippery definition of territorial incorporation. To wit, territories were due the full protections of the Constitution only when Congress had incorporated them as an *integral* part of the United States. Facing this decision, second-tier Chief Justice John Marshall Harlan's dissent is particularly incisive since it identifies the break with precedent that the court was undertaking. He called the majority holding a "radical and mischievous change in our system of government."<sup>45</sup> Marshall stated: "The idea that this country may acquire territories anywhere upon the earth, by conquest or treaty, and hold them as mere colonies or provinces—the people inhabiting them to enjoy only such rights as Congress chooses to accord them—is wholly inconsistent with the spirit and genius as well as the words of the Constitution."<sup>46</sup> Ineluctably, these questions about constitutional and congressional forms of citizenship would take on new significance when citizenship was extended to Puerto Rico.

Citizenship was granted two decades after US takeover by an act of Congress, the Jones-Shafroth Act of 1917, which suspended the Foraker Act. With citizenship came the Selective Service Act of 1917: twenty thousand Puerto Ricans were drafted as soldiers for World War I. Hence, Puerto Ricans got citizenship, but in a plainly transactional way—for mandatory conscription in the US armed services at the beginning of a major war. In respect to long-term consequences of US colonization, a lesser-known feature of the Jones-Shafroth Act would have tremendous impact on the island and its economy in the twenty-first century: the issuance of a so-called "triple tax exempt" status for governmental bonds. In brief, to pay for the new administrative government that the US Congress had just designed (and demanded direct financial control of), it issued bonds, underwritten by the island's primary utilities. They were not subject to local, state, or federal taxes.<sup>47</sup> As Evaluz Cotto-Quijano describes it, "triple tax exemption was approved not only to save the US government money, but also to generate revenue for US financial institutions—institutions that were themselves major players in the US expansion in the Caribbean."<sup>48</sup> In addition, Puerto Rico's inability to control the terms of tax-incentive policies or economic production has profoundly contributed to the debt it carries, purportedly some seventy-four billion dollars in bond debt alone. Puerto Rico's poverty rate is approximately forty-four percent. It is double that of Mississippi, the state with the highest poverty rate, according to the 2019 US Census Bureau. Puerto Rico's income inequality is also higher.

Later Insular Cases further complicated the meaning of territorial citizenship. *Balzac v. Porto Rico* (1922) was a case in which a newspaper editor, Jesús M. Balzac, was charged with libel for publishing a letter that indirectly referenced the US-appointed governor of Puerto Rico. Balzac countersued to have the right to a trial by jury. The US Supreme Court, however, used this occasion to determine that the full rights of the US Constitution did not apply to the territories. Hence, citizens of US territories were not

entitled to trial by jury or to a range of unspecified rights that the court did not deem “fundamental.”<sup>49</sup> The difference between what constituted personal rights or fundamental rights was left to broad interpretation. The Supreme Court thus created a poor basis for the separation of categories of rights and only deepened the sorts of illegibility at the crux of territorial designation.

Ultimately, the *Balzac* ruling proved significant (and controversial) on yet another level, pressing simultaneously on the meanings of territorial incorporation and the locus of law. Because Congress had not incorporated Puerto Rico into the Union, it would not receive all provisions of the Bill of Rights, namely the Sixth Amendment or the right to a trial by jury. Incorporation did not follow citizenship—that much could be deduced. Secondly, Chief Justice William Howard Taft (the US president from 1909–1913, and prior to that, governor of the Philippines from 1901–1904) made “locality” the basis of his denial of Balzac’s claim: “It is locality that is determinative of the application of the Constitution, in such matters as judicial procedure, and not the status [read citizenship] of the people who live in it.”<sup>50</sup> The court thus cited physical geography as a means of determining rights. A living legacy of the Insular Cases is that personal rights can be meted or retracted on the basis of location.

Though US Congress approved legislation in 1947 allowing Puerto Ricans to elect their own governor, they retained control of almost all aspects of Puerto Rican life. *Califano v. Torres* (1978) and *Harris v. Rosario* (1980), two latter-day Insular Cases, for example, set precedent for the Supreme Court to dismiss challenges to cases of discrimination in federal welfare funding to US citizens in Puerto Rico.<sup>51</sup> The court ruled that it was acceptable to fund programs such as Medicare, Medicaid, and Aid to Families with Dependent Children at starkly reduced rates and with fixed annual funding caps.

Lastly, the debt structure that the Jones-Shafroth Act unintentionally created through the disbursement of triple-exempt bonds, along with the vulnerability that ecological disaster and territoriality concentrates, has economically and financially crippled a twenty-first century Puerto Rico—and sewn up avenues for legal recourse. Puerto Rico is the largest and by far the most populous of the five inhabited US territories, yet each island territory has a significantly higher rate of poverty than any state in the United States. Island territories bear the costs of a US domestic policy that is generated in an entirely different context than where it will be applied. Islands are effectively zones of impact. (This idea takes on pointed meaning in the twentieth century when Vieques, Puerto Rico’s easternmost island, became a literal bombing range for the US military, contaminating the water, soil, and tidal ecosystems with Agent Orange and depleted uranium.)

In retrospect, it is hardly remarkable that significant strands of an American official history and diplomacy at the beginning of the twentieth century from A.T. Mahan or Elihu Root (authoritative, and with a strong degree of moral certitude) posited the sanctity of national sovereignty as a rhetorical frontispiece. Nor is it exceptional that land seizures, military occupations, and the ongoing expropriation of island

supply depots in the Caribbean and Pacific were quietly deployed to actualize this self-sufficiency. More than anything, the combined records illustrate that territory is a flexible concept. It is not just the outcome of the territorial process—or a materialization of possession. Rather, it is something that is produced through a language of rights (defined, granted, or withheld). It is also the kind of thing that can be revealed through an environment that has largely been deterritorialized or dislodged from its local anchors. Finally, if geography can be enlisted as a basis for denying full entitlements of citizenship then the very ways places are constituted (through people's histories, discourses, material and social networks, and physical environments) are also fraught loci of belonging. For these reasons, it is especially important to read beneath the legalistic statutes of US territorialization and bring to light the networks they overwrite. It is critical to pose questions about whose interests overwriting serves.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> This poll reflects public perception prior to the strike of Hurricane María in September 2017, which brought considerable news coverage to the island. "Morning Consult National Tracking Poll #170916," September 22–24, 2017, [https://morningconsult.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/170916\\_crosstabs\\_pr\\_v1\\_KD.pdf](https://morningconsult.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/170916_crosstabs_pr_v1_KD.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> See Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon, 1995); Vincent Brown, "Mapping a Slave Revolt: Visualizing Spatial History through the Archives of Slavery," *Social Text* 33, no. 4, 125 (December 2015): 134–41, <https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-3315826>.

<sup>3</sup> David Harvey, *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1996), 80.

<sup>4</sup> Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History, 1660–1783* (London: Sampson Low and Company, 1890).

<sup>5</sup> Holger H. Herwig, "The Failure of German Sea Power: Mahan, Tirpitz, and Raeder Reconsidered," *The International History Review* 10, no. 1 (February 1988): 72–73, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.1988.9640469>.

<sup>6</sup> Deborah Cowen, *The Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in Global Trade*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 8.

<sup>7</sup> See also Kenneth Weisbrode, "The American Archipelago," *Historically Speaking* 11, no. 1 (January 2010): 24–27.

<sup>8</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 49.

- <sup>9</sup> “Jefferson’s Entangling Alliances.” Editorial. *New York Times*, March 27, 1898, 18, <https://www.nytimes.com/1898/03/27/archives/jeffersons-entangling-alliances.html>.
- <sup>10</sup> “Jefferson’s Entangling Alliances,” 18.
- <sup>11</sup> “A Wholesome Stimulus to Higher Politics.” Editorial. *The Atlantic Monthly*, March 1899, 289–92, here 289.
- <sup>12</sup> “A Wholesome Stimulus,” 289–90.
- <sup>13</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt, 1921), <https://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Texts/frontier.html>.
- <sup>14</sup> Alyosha Goldstein, “Introduction: Toward a Genealogy of the U.S. Colonial Present,” in *Formations of United States Colonialism*, ed. Alyosha Goldstein (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 4.
- <sup>15</sup> Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel, “Colonial and Mexican Archipelagoes,” in *Archipelagic American Studies*, ed. Brian Russell Roberts and Michelle Ann Stephens (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 160.
- <sup>16</sup> United States, Annual Reports of the War Department for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1900, Part 13, *Report of the Military Governor of Porto Rico on Civil Affairs 1898–1900* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1902), 36.
- <sup>17</sup> Eileen J. Suárez Findlay, *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870–1920* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 118.
- <sup>18</sup> US Department of War, *Report of the Military Governor of Porto Rico on Civil Affairs*, 116.
- <sup>19</sup> United States, Department of War, *Annual Reports of the Secretary of War 1899–1903* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1904), 34.
- <sup>20</sup> Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), 68.
- <sup>21</sup> Lanny Thompson, “Heuristic Geographies,” in *Archipelagic American Studies*, ed. Brian Russell Roberts and Michelle Ann Stephens (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 61.
- <sup>22</sup> It ultimately took a joint resolution in Congress, introduced by Félix Córdova Dávila in 1931, to return it to the original name of Puerto Rico. See “Change of name; Puerto Rico,” 48 U.S. Code § 731a (May 17, 1932, ch. 190, 47 Stat. 158).
- <sup>23</sup> Mark Twain, *The Complete Interviews*, ed. Gary Scharnhorst (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 358.
- <sup>24</sup> Mark Twain, “To the Person Sitting in Darkness,” *North American Review*, February 1901, <https://people.virginia.edu/~sfr/enam482e/totheperson.html>.

<sup>25</sup> See Judith Madera, *Black Atlas: Geography and Flow in Nineteenth-Century African American Literature* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 154–55.

<sup>26</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, “The Administration of the Island Possessions,” Coliseum, Hartford, Connecticut, 22 August 1902.

<sup>27</sup> Roosevelt, “The Administration of the Island Possessions.”

<sup>28</sup> Doreen Massey, *For Space*, 101.

<sup>29</sup> Stuart B. Schwartz, “Puerto Rico’s Hurricane María Proves Once Again that Natural Disasters are Never Natural,” *History News Network*, October 2, 2017, <http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/167090>.

<sup>30</sup> See Yarimar Bonilla and Marisol LeBrón, eds., *Aftershocks of Disaster* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2019).

<sup>31</sup> Neil Smith, “There’s No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster,” *Items: Insights from the Social Sciences*, published June 11, 2006, <https://items.ssrc.org/understanding-katrina/theres-no-such-thing-as-a-natural-disaster/>. Smith’s observations are especially applicable to Hurricane María. See Frances Negrón-Mutaner, “Blackout,” *Political Letters*, published March 2, 2018, <https://power.buellcenter.columbia.edu/essays/blackout-what-darkness-illuminated-puerto-rico>.

<sup>32</sup> Stuart B. Schwartz, “Hurricanes and the Shaping of Circum-Caribbean Societies,” *The Florida Historical Quarterly* 83, no. 4 (Spring, 2005): 381–409, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30149583>; Schwartz, “Puerto Rico’s Hurricane.”

<sup>33</sup> See Laird W. Bergad, “Coffee and Rural Proletarianization in Puerto Rico, 1840–1898,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 15, no. 1 (May 1983): 86. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X00009573>.

<sup>34</sup> Sidney W. Mintz, *Three Ancient Colonies: Caribbean Themes and Variations* (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 2010), 136.

<sup>35</sup> César J. Ayala, “The American Sugar Kingdom, 1898–1934,” in *The Caribbean: A History of the Region and Its Peoples*, ed. Stephan Palmié and Francisco A. Scarano (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 442.

<sup>36</sup> See Reinaldo Funes Monzote, trans. Alex Martin, *From Rainforest to Cane Field in Cuba: An Environmental History since 1492* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

<sup>37</sup> Pedro A. Cabán, “Puerto Rico: State Formation in a Colonial Context,” *Caribbean Studies* 30, no. 2 (December 2002): 170–215. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i25613368>.

<sup>38</sup> See José I. Fusté, “Repeating Islands of Debt,” *Radical History Review* 128 (2017): 100, <https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-3857830>.



- <sup>39</sup> Nelson A. Denis, *War Against All Puerto Ricans* (New York: Nation Books, 2015), <https://waragainstallpuertoricans.com/2016/03/07/the-man-who-stole-puerto-rico/>.
- <sup>40</sup> *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).
- <sup>41</sup> 163 U.S. 537 (1896), overruled by *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 US 483 (1954).
- <sup>42</sup> Juan R. Torruella, *The Insular Cases: The Establishment of a Regime of Political Apartheid*, Penn Law: Legal Scholarship Repository, 2014, 286, <https://scholarship.law.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1162&context=jil>.
- <sup>43</sup> *Downes v. Bidwell*, 182 U.S. 244, 341–42 (White, J. concurring).
- <sup>44</sup> See Manuel Madrid, “How the Tax Cut Sacks Puerto Rico,” *The American Prospect*, June 28, 2018, <https://prospect.org/article/how-tax-cut-sacks-puerto-rico>.
- <sup>45</sup> *Downes*, 182 U.S. 379 (1901).
- <sup>46</sup> *Downes*, 182 U.S. 378.
- <sup>47</sup> See also Peter James Hudson, *Bankers and Empire: How Wall Street Colonized the Caribbean* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).
- <sup>48</sup> Evaluz Cotto-Quijano, “How the Triple Tax Exemption on Puerto Rico’s Bonds Financed Its Territorial Status—and Helped Spark Its Debt Crisis,” *ProMarket.org* September 11, 2018, <https://promarket.org/triple-tax-exemption-puerto-ricos-bonds-financed-territorial-status-helped-spark-debt-crisis/>.
- <sup>49</sup> *Balzac v. Porto Rico*, 258 U.S. 298, 304–05 (1922).
- <sup>50</sup> *Balzac*, 308–09.
- <sup>51</sup> *Califano v. Torres*, 435 U.S. 1 (1978); *Harris v. Rosario*, 446 U.S. 651 (1980).

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