RURAL PUERTO RICO IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY RECONSIDERED: Land and Society, 1899–1915

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Abstract: The U.S. occupation of Puerto Rico in 1898 radically altered patterns of social and economic development. Examination of census and archival data on land tenure reveals that contrary to generally accepted conclusions, land tenure did not become more concentrated in fewer hands in the years from 1898 to 1915. Instead, and despite massive agro-industrial investments by U.S. sugar corporations, more small farmers owned land in 1915 than at the end of the Spanish colonial period in 1898. This surprising revelation contradicts the findings of all previous studies, and it prompts us to research further the social and economic impact of U.S. colonialism in Puerto Rico in the first decades of the twentieth century.

No theme has dominated scholarship on twentieth-century Puerto Rico more than the issue of how the U.S. military occupation of 1898 and subsequent annexation altered patterns of social, economic, political, and cultural life for Puerto Ricans. The analytical conclusions of several generations of scholars have ranged widely: from extreme denunciations of U.S. imperialism and its purported ruthless exploitation and impoverishment of the island in the decades prior to and including the Great Depression to unabashed praises of the U.S. invasion for having saved Puerto Rico from the tyranny of Spanish colonialism, for building a modern economic infrastructure, and for eventually ushering in an era of democracy, relative prosperity, and social mobility after World War II.[1] With the transformations in

1. Victor S. Clark and his coauthors initiated a debate on social and economic conditions in Puerto Rico after three decades of U.S. rule. See Clark et al., *Porto Rico and Its Problems* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1930). Bailey Diffie and Justine Diffie were highly critical of the social effects of sugar monoculture and absentee capital in *Porto Rico: A Broken Pledge* (New York: Vanguard, 1931); see also Esteban Bird, *Report on the Sugar Industry in Relation to the Social and Economic System of Puerto Rico* (San Juan: Government Office of Supplies, Printing, and Transportation, 1941; first published in 1937). A detailed study was commissioned by the Association of Sugar Producers of Puerto Rico, that by Arthur D. Gayer, Paul T. Homan, and Earle K. James, *The Sugar Economy of Puerto Rico* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938). The standard works on development after World War II are Harvey S.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002387910001952X Published online by Cambridge University Press

socioeconomic structures of the post-1945 era resulting from rapid industrial development, the dramatic changes occurring in economy and society and their impact on culture became an important focus of scholarship that in some ways diverted attention from the debate over the significance of 1898. Again, however, conclusions on industrialization became fairly bifurcated. They ranged from scathing attacks on U.S. policies that led to the large-scale out-migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States in the 1950s and 1960s to laudatory applause for democratic development, economic growth, and improvements in the standard of living for many on the island, who came to enjoy the highest per capita income in the Caribbean region.[2]

The island's unresolved status has been another constant theme in intellectual life, especially since the foundation of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico in 1952. This theme emerged immediately after the 1898 invasion, when the island was made a de facto colony of the United States but without a clearly defined political status. The never-ending debate has revolved around whether Puerto Rico should be a colonial territory subject to the authority of the U.S. Congress that enjoys limited self-government (its current status) or should become a U.S. state or an independent republic. Ultimately, proponents of any of the three major positions have had to reckon with the U.S. role and its impact in Puerto Rico since 1898, attacking or defending it according to their political persuasions.

The invasion in 1898 was obviously pivotal in the island's contemporary history. Yet despite the event's serving as a central point of reference for twentieth-century scholarship and political debate, the impact of U.S. control remains far from clear in certain time periods and social sectors. Studies condemning the U.S. role in island society have purposefully ignored improvements experienced by Puerto Ricans. Others, determined to heap praise on the United States and its control over the island after 1898, have ignored enduring poverty and periods of anti-democratic political repression.

The broad parameters of the changing political order are well known. The Autonomous government headed by Puerto Ricans elected in 1898 was

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Perloff, *Puerto Rico's Economic Future* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1950); Henry Wells, *The Modernization of Puerto Rico* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969); James Dietz, *Economic History of Puerto Rico: Institutional Change and Capitalist Development* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986); and Emilio Pantojas-García, *Development Strategies as Ideology: Puerto Rico's Export-Led Industrialization Experience* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1990).

2. The History Task Force at the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, City University of New York, criticized the wave of migration generated by Operation Bootstrap in the 1950s. See *Labor Migration under Capitalism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979). A recent optimistic view of economic development under commonwealth status is William J. Baumol and Edward N. Wolff, "Catching Up in the Postwar Period: Puerto Rico as the Fifth 'Tiger'?" *World Development* 24, no. 5 (May 1996):869–86. The most recent estimates of per capita incomes, social conditions, and migration flows based on census data come from Francisco L. Rivera-Batiz, *Island Paradox: Puerto Rico in the 1990s* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1996).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002387910001952X Published online by Cambridge University Press

suppressed in favor of first a military government and then a civilian-led colonial government, after the Foraker Act was enacted in 1900 without consulting Puerto Ricans. The ideal of political democracy that was expected by the island's elite classes in the aftermath of the U.S. takeover was scarcely realized as both the governor and the highest legislative body were appointed rather than elected. Moreover, these offices were controlled by citizens of the United States, which Puerto Ricans were not until the Jones Act of 1917. Still, democratic rights such as freedom of speech and the press, the right to organize labor unions, and a more regularized judicial system were extended to all Puerto Ricans and protected by U.S. law.[3]

In the economic sphere, large-scale investments by U.S. corporations in sugar cultivation and manufacture and in tobacco processing led those industries to rise at the expense of coffee, which had dominated the Puerto Rican export economy since the 1880s. The inclusion of Puerto Rico in the U.S. tariff system after 1901 opened an immense market to sugar and tobacco producers on favorable terms relative to their Cuban counterparts, who paid 80 percent of U.S. tariffs, or producers in the Dominican Republic, who paid the full duty on sugar and tobacco sold in the U.S. market. At the same time, Puerto Rican coffee producers lost the traditional protected markets they had enjoyed under the Spanish regime and were forced to compete in the U.S. market, where coffee was not protected by tariffs.

U.S. capital also flowed into and dominated Puerto Rican banking, insurance, transportation, utilities, and other industries. Puerto Rican trade relations with Europe plummeted as the United States became the island's dominant trading partner. Social and political movements appeared representing the previously disenfranchised. Workers organized unions and eventually a political party, while women formed a broadly based social movement seeking equality and especially the right to vote.[4]

3. A solid constitutional and legal history of U.S. colonialism in Puerto Rico is José Trías Monge, *Puerto Rico: The Trials of the Oldest Colony in the World* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997).

4. On working-class women, see the introduction in Julio Ramos, *Amor y anarquía: Los escritos de Luisa Capetillo* (Río Piedras, P.R.: Huracán, 1992). Recent works on the neglected women's history are *Género y trabajo: La industria de la aguja en Puerto Rico y el Caribe hispano*, edited by María del Carmen Baerga (Río Piedras: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1993); *Puerto Rican Women's History: New Perspectives*, edited by Linda C. Delgado and Félix Matos (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 1998); and María de Fátima Barceló Miller, *La lucha por el sufragio femenino en Puerto Rico, 1896–1935* (Río Piedras, P.R.: Huracán, 1997). On the Federación Libre de los Trabajadores de Puerto Rico and the Partido Socialista de Puerto Rico, see Angel G. Quintero Rivera, *Lucha obrera en Puerto Rico: Antología de grandes documentos en la historia obrera puertorriqueña* (Río Piedras, P.R.: Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Puertorriqueña, 1971). See also his articles: "La clase obrera y el proceso político en Puerto Rico," *Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 18, nos. 1–2 (1974):147–98; "La clase obrera y el proceso político en Puerto Rico: El capitalismo y el proletariado rural," *Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 18, nos. 3–4 (1975):61–107; "El partido socialista y la política triangular de las primeras décadas bajo la dominación norteamericana," *Revista*

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002387910001952X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Although most of the Puerto Rican population lived on farms and haciendas at the close of the nineteenth century, the details of their experiences in the new economic order ushered in by large-scale U.S. corporate investments after 1898 have been largely ignored in the historiography, which has favored political themes or sweeping generalizations about the new economy. In relation to this rural population, the polarity between absentee capital and Puerto Rican labor has been stressed, and the policies of the colonial government in the immediate aftermath of 1898 have been studied as a function of this polarity. The major investments carried out by highly concentrated sugar and tobacco trusts in the United States reinforced this focus.

Emphasis on this polarity overlooked the fact that most rural laborers worked for Puerto Rican farmers, not absentee corporations, and that local landowners remained an important force in the new economic order of the early twentieth century. This situation applied not only in Puerto Rico but in Cuba and the Dominican Republic.[5] Stressing the roles played by U.S. agribusinesses has led to the nuances in the development of social and economic structures being largely ignored. Local class structures in the early twentieth century were not shaped primarily by the decisions of U.S. investors, as has been assumed in nearly all the literature, but by inherited patterns of land tenure and economic organization. Absentee corporations had to contend with the social structures inherited from the Spanish colonial period on a densely populated island with no available frontier lands. This situation contrasted sharply with other regions of the Caribbean, such as eastern Cuba and La Romana in the Dominican Republic, where the same corporations that invested in Puerto Rico created an entirely new sugar economy on sparsely populated virgin lands by using imported immigrant workers.[6]

To measure the impact of the U.S. takeover, it must be stressed that

de Ciencias Sociales 19, no. 1 (1975):49–100; "La desintegración de la política de clases: La base material para la Coalición," *Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 19, no. 3 (1975):261–300; and "La desintegración de la política de clases: De la política obrera al populismo," *Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 20, no. 1 (1976):3–49. See also Miles Galvin, *The Organized Labor Movement in Puerto Rico* (Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University Presses, 1979); and Blanca Silvestrini, *Los trabajadores puertorriqueños y el Partido Socialista (1932–1940)* (Río Piedras: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1979).

5. The landmark study by Diffie and Diffie, *Porto Rico: A Broken Pledge*, emphasized the role of big business and the misery of the rural proletariat and became a classic in the literature on Puerto Rico. The book is part of a series that included studies of U.S. imperialism in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Central America. See Leland H. Jenks, *Our Cuban Colony* (New York: Vanguard, 1929); Melvin K. Knight, *The Americans in Santo Domingo* (New York: Vanguard, 1928); and Charles D. Kepner and Jay H. Soothill, *The Banana Empire* (New York: Vanguard, 1935). All these studies emphasized industrial concentration and the role of the trusts.

6. See César Ayala, *American Sugar Kingdom: The Plantation Economy of the Spanish Caribbean, 1898–1934* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 183–230.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002387910001952X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Puerto Rico at the turn of the twentieth century was above all an agrarian society with a low level of urbanization. At most, 23 percent of the total population lived in urban areas in 1899.[7] But even this figure is somewhat misleading in that most urban Puerto Ricans lived in small towns and villages rather than in larger cities and were closely linked to a predominantly rural economy. Little change had occurred by 1910, when roughly 26 percent of all Puerto Ricans were classified as living in urban areas, according to municipal data in that year's census.[8] It is therefore logical to focus on the kinds of factors that affected the rural population in their daily lives if the changes effected by the shift from Spanish to U.S. colonialism are to be evaluated. The most fundamental aspect of life for rural populations is their relationship to land, and we will begin by looking at a series of variables related to how patterns of landownership changed in the aftermath of the events of 1898.

LANDED AND LANDLESS

A central tenet of Puerto Rican historiography on early-twentieth-century transformations is that Puerto Rican farmers lost land to expanding U.S. corporations and were gradually (and in some areas, rapidly) converted into a landless rural proletariat. Purported land alienation has been linked to the devaluation of circulating specie occurring with the advent of the U.S. dollar as the island's official currency in 1899 and in new tax obligations imposed on supposedly cash-strapped landowners by the colonial administration that "forced" them to sell land to pay taxes.[9] This purported chain

7. Summary census data for 1899 indicate that 15 percent of the population lived in urban areas. Yet disaggregated data by municipal district, which lists the number of persons living in the principal town in each municipality, yields a figure of 23 percent. See U.S. War Department, Office of Director of the Census of Porto Rico, *Report on the Census of Porto Rico, 1899* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1900), 335–38. Many of the *municipios* of Puerto Rico had less than 2,500 inhabitants, so they were not counted in the calculation of the "urban population" in summary data presented. When the population of these towns is totaled and counted as "urban," there was an urban population in 1899 of 214,980 out of a total population of 953,243 (23 percent).

8. See the data for 1910 presented in U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930: Outlying Territories and Possessions* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1932), 124, 132.

9. These arguments are summarized in Dietz, *Economic History of Puerto Rico*, 90–91. Also see Edward J. Berbusse, *The United States in Puerto Rico, 1898–1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966). The origins of the argument stressing the impact of the declaration of the dollar as the official currency of the island in 1899 on the devaluation of the Puerto Rican peso are unknown, although this view has been repeated time and again by those seeking to indict the new colonial administration. Implicit in this argument is the assumption that specie circulated widely prior to 1899 and was devalued thereafter. In fact, the circulation of currency and the use of specie in Puerto Rico during the late nineteenth century

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002387910001952X Published online by Cambridge University Press

of events encouraged the accumulation and concentration of landownership, in effect destroying an independent class of small farmers who supposedly had dominated rural Puerto Rico before 1898, or so the story goes.[10]

A number of problems plague these interpretations. The first revolves around the impact of the Hollander Tax on land, designed by Johns Hopkins University economist Jacob Hollander. This tax was initially set at 2 percent of property values and was then reduced to 1 percent after local proprietors complained. What was contentious about the new taxation system was its imposition by the colonial government. The power to assess property values was entirely in the hands of officials appointed by the colonial governor, who was in turn appointed by the president of the United States. Assessments of property values were not made by locally elected officials, as was the norm in the United States, and this situation led to a wave of protests by landowners who had expected the extension of democratic practices after 1898, especially in issues of taxation.[11]

The advent of the land tax has been interpreted as having led to large-scale alienation of land, particularly by small-scale farmers who were supposedly forced to sell because they did not have the capital to pay the tax. Yet the first decade of U.S. rule over Puerto Rico was characterized by the

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was restricted to the upper classes in rural zones and otherwise in urban areas where a minority of the population resided. The vast majority of the rural population never had access to specie in significant quantities, nor did the poorer sectors of the urban population. They were usually paid in chits (*vales* or *riles*) or simply assigned nonmonetary credits as salaries for redemption in small-scale *pulperías* or company stores. On the dearth of banking institutions in the nineteenth century, see Annie Santiago de Curet, *Crédito, moneda y bancos en Puerto Rico durante el siglo xix* (Río Piedras: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1989), esp. 182–84. On the substitution of U.S. coinage for Puerto Rican coinage, see Biagio di Venuti, *Money and Banking in Puerto Rico* (Río Piedras: University of Puerto Rico Press, 1950), 14–25. Various sectors argued for different exchange rates. Debate continues as to whether a devaluation occurred and its extent. The change, however, was apparently smaller than that implied by the substitution of *macuquina* coins for Spanish minted silver currency in 1857, when the macuquina was withdrawn at a discount of 12.5 percent. To the degree that a devaluation occurred in 1899, its main effect was to favor farm owners whose debts and mortgages were denominated in "current pesos" in contracts, to the detriment of creditors. We fail to see how a devaluation of the currency forced farm owners to sell. Workers dependent on wages, in contrast, were probably hurt by the maintenance of nominally stable prices (e.g., 1 cent for a loaf of bread in both the old and new currencies). Even this point is uncertain.

10. For example, see Kelvin Antonio Santiago, "La concentración y la centralización de la propiedad en Puerto Rico, 1898–1929," *Hómines* 6, no. 2 (1983):129 (published by Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico). He argued, "En contraste con la metrópoli española, Estados Unidos opera unos cambios estructurales que definen una nueva relación colonial: 1. Expropiación y dominio del medio de producción principal: la tierra; 2. Control de los medios de intercambio. . . ." See also Kelvin Santiago-Valles, *"Subject People" and Colonial Discourses: Economic Transformation and Social Disorder in Puerto Rico, 1898–1947* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 32–40.

11. The treasurer of Puerto Rico in charge of collecting the tax acknowledged that it was a contentious matter: "The administration of the property tax, it should be said, is entirely in

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growth of small farms rather than their expropriation. The new land tax placed pressures on the largest landowners with idle lands either to put them into productive use or to sell them. Rather than accelerating the concentration of property, the tax led to the parcelization of large farms, an increase in the number of property owners, and a decrease in average farm size. The effect of the tax was to accelerate the incorporation of land, already highly concentrated at the time of the U.S. invasion, into the rapidly expanding market economy.

The second problem revolves around the impact of the assumed process of widespread land accumulation by absentee corporations in the coastal sugar-producing zones of the island. Three of the four large corporations that came to dominate the sugar industry by the 1930s were established shortly after the U.S. occupation of 1898: the Aguirre Sugar Company was founded in 1899; the South Porto Rico Sugar Company, owner of Central Guánica (the largest on the island), was incorporated in 1901; and the Fajardo Sugar Company was established in 1905. These early firms became the dominant U.S. sugar enterprises during the first decade of the twentieth century. In Cuba and the Dominican Republic, high sugar prices in World War I generated a boom in foreign investment resulting in the creation of multiple sugar corporations, but no new sugar companies were established in Puerto Rico during the war or even later, although the total sugar production of U.S. companies and locally owned *centrales* continued to increase. Thus the first decade of the twentieth century was the critical time of expansion of U.S. sugar interests on the island.[12]

The presence of these corporations and their level of vertical integration with the oligopolistic U.S. sugar-refining industry are not in ques-

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the hands of the insular government, the treasury of Porto Rico making the assessment of property and taking charge of the collection of the tax. The reasons for this arrangement, instead of one by which the tax is collected by the local authorities, as usually prevails in the United States, are to secure economy of administration, on the one hand, and on the other, to avoid the inequitable action in respect to both the assessment of property and the collection of the taxes that would result if these matters were left to the local authorities." See William Franklin Willoughby, *Territories and Dependencies of the United States: Their Government and Administration* (New York: Century, 1905), 150.

12. Aguirre Sugar Company, *Fiftieth Anniversary Report* (New York: Aguirre Sugar Company, 1949); South Porto Rico Sugar Company, *Fiftieth Anniversary Report* (New York: South Porto Rico Sugar Company, 1951); and Fajardo Sugar Company, *Fiftieth Anniversary Report* (New York: Fajardo Sugar Company, 1955). A fourth U.S. corporation, the United Porto Rico Sugar Company, was founded in 1926 and subsequently reorganized as the Eastern Sugar Associates. The United Porto Rico Sugar Company purchased and reorganized existing sugar mills but did not erect new mills. See Ayala, *American Sugar Kingdom*, 107–20. U.S. investors moved into Cuba immediately after the invasion of 1898, setting up important corporations and expanding massively again in a new wave of investments during World War I. On the early investments, see James H. Hitchman, "U.S. Control over Sugar Production, 1898–1902," *Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs* 12, no. 1 (Jan. 1970):90–106.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002387910001952X Published online by Cambridge University Press

tion. But their impact on island society should be carefully reconsidered. A fundamental problem revolves around the nature and patterns of landownership prevailing in Puerto Rico before the advent of a modernized sugar economy in coastal zones after 1898. The assumption that landholding was widespread in Puerto Rico prior to the U.S. occupation and that significant land was lost after 1898 is erroneous. Landownership was highly concentrated well before 1898 in the districts that came under the domination of foreign-owned corporations in the twentieth century, also the case in the coffee-exporting districts long before the United States ever demonstrated any interest in Puerto Rico.[13]

A final question must address the actual empirical record and determine if in fact Puerto Ricans lost their land after 1898, as has been alleged. Did the percentage of persons owning land in Puerto Rico really decline after 1898 because of U.S. economic penetration in the island?

Although most studies of agrarian Puerto Rico in the early twentieth century have emphasized the progressive concentration of landholding after 1898, few have recognized that landholders constituted a very small portion of Puerto Rican rural society in the late Spanish colonial period. Many scholars have repeated a misleading statement from the census of 1899 to the effect that landownership was not very concentrated in Puerto Rico.[14] In the 1930s, Bailey Diffie and Justine Diffie wrote a classic study that was highly critical of U.S. corporate landownership but recognized nevertheless that land was highly concentrated in 1899. They explicitly addressed the misleading census statement and argued that in 1899, "a high percentage of farmers were owners, but the bulk of the land belonged to a chosen few."[15]

In light of this conclusion, it is surprising that subsequent scholars have cited the Diffie study to document the purported equitable distribution of land before the U.S. occupation of 1898.[16] During the 1930s, in protests against the ravages of sugar monoculture on some social sectors and deteriorating economic conditions during the Great Depression, a nostalgia arose

13. See Laird W. Bergad, *Coffee and the Growth of Agrarian Capitalism in Nineteenth-Century Puerto Rico* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1983).

14. U.S. War Department, Office of the Census of Porto Rico, *Report on the Census of Porto Rico, 1899*, 18. According to this report, "While in Cuba, the proportion of farm owners to the whole number of farms is but 28 percent, in Porto Rico it is 93 percent. On the other hand, the proportion of the cultivated area owned by occupants is but 44 percent in Cuba, while in Porto Rico it is 91 percent. In other words, a large proportion of the cultivated area of Cuba is in the hands of comparatively few landlords, some of whom reside outside the Island, while in Porto Rico large numbers of the rural population own their homes and are permanent residents."

15. Diffie and Diffie, *Porto Rico: A Broken Pledge*, 22.

16. In the Diffie and Diffie book, however, the authors pointed out that these data did not mean that 91 percent of families owned land and that what the census figures of 1899 actually demonstrate is extreme land concentration. They provided a table based on the Census of 1899, showing that the largest 2 percent of all farms owned 72 percent of the land area.

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for a purportedly golden age when land was widely distributed.[17] By the 1950s, the idea that land had been widely distributed prior to 1898 gained currency, to the point that Earl Parker Hanson, an important U.S. analyst of Puerto Rico's development program, wrote confidently, "in Puerto Rico, however, latifundia had never amounted to much under Spain."[18] In 1986 a major scholarly work on Puerto Rico argued that in a massive process of land concentration in the first decade of U.S. rule, the share of land in farms of less than nineteen acres decreased from 33 to 12 percent, and the share of land in farms larger than one hundred acres increased from 36 percent to 63 percent.[19] Even recently, another scholar erroneously argued that small

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Despite this finding, Manuel Maldonado Denis stated, "The Diffies, however, inform us that around 1899 Puerto Rican agriculturists owned 93 percent of the existing farms and estates in Puerto Rico, so that on the island, 'a great number of people from the rural population were homeowners and permanent residents of the island.'" See Maldonado Denis, *Puerto Rico: A Socio-Historical Interpretation*, (New York: Vintage, 1972), 75. Nor did he mention the *Report on the Census of Porto Rico, 1899*, the actual source. Through this omission, the citation was attributed to Diffie and Diffie, who had cited the census and provided the sobering statistics about the actual level of land concentration. Their findings blatantly contradict conclusions drawn by Maldonado Denis. To buttress his arguments, he also cited Henry K. Carroll, *Report on the Island of Porto Rico* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1899) but gave no page numbers. Carroll, however, was unequivocal about the degree of proletarianization in Puerto Rico: "Those who depend upon daily wages for support constitute the great majority of the people" (p. 48). The same confusion can be found in the Spanish-language version of Maldonado Denis's work, *Puerto Rico: Una interpretación histórico-social* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1969), 72; and in his previous work *Hacia una interpretación marxista de la historia de Puerto Rico y otros ensayos* (Río Piedras: Antillana, 1977), 71–72. We cite Maldonado Denis because subsequent historians have often referred to his work as a source on issues of land concentration without examining the documentary sources.

17. Nationalist leader Pedro Albizu Campos spoke of a vanished legion of proprietors: "Debe surgir de nuevo la legión de propietarios que teníamos antes de 1898." See Albizu Campos, "Comentarios del Presidente del Partido Nacionalista al margen del informe rendido por el Instituto Brookings," *El Mundo*, 2 May 1930; reproduced in Pedro Albizu Campos, *Obras escogidas, Tomo 1, 1923–1936*, edited by J. Benjamín Torres (San Juan: Jelofe, 1975), 98–103, 103. Also see, for example, Miguel Meléndez Muñoz, "Nuestra tierra se nos va" (1919), in *Obras completas de Miguel Meléndez Muñoz* (San Juan: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1963), p. 474; Luis Muñoz Marín, "Porto Rico: The American Colony," *Nation* 120, no. 8 (Apr. 1925), p. 381; Luis Muñoz Marín, "The Sad Case of Porto Rico," *American Mercury*, no. 16 (Feb. 1929):138–39; and Francisco M. Zeno, *Influencia de la industria azucarera en la vida antillana y sus consecuencias sociales . . .* (San Juan: Tipografía La Correspondencia de Puerto Rico, 1935), 116.

18. Earl Parker Hanson, *Transformation: The Story of Modern Puerto Rico* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955), 29.

19. In *Economic History of Puerto Rico*, Dietz showed that landownership became more concentrated by comparing figures for land under cultivation in 1899 with land in farms in 1910, 1920, and 1930 (p. 107). According to his figures, farms over 100 *cuerdas* in Puerto Rico controlled 36 percent of the land in 1899 but 63 percent of the land in 1910 and 66 percent of the land in 1920. This conclusion was reached by contrasting incommensurable categories. The figures for land in farms, the commensurable category, in 1899 show that 851 farms over 100 acres (2 percent of all farms) controlled 72 percent of the land area. Use of comparable figures

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farmers disappeared on a massive scale in the decade between 1910 and 1920.[20] Somehow, scholarly recognition that land was already concentrated in Puerto Rico under the Spanish colonial regime, prevalent in studies of the nineteenth century, fades slowly when scholars examine the issue of land concentration in the twentieth century.

The census reports on Puerto Rico of 1899 and 1910 permit examination of how rural landholding evolved in the first decade of U.S. control over the island. Detailed data by municipal district on total and urban populations, average family size, and farms have allowed calculation of the number and percentage of families owning land in each municipality of the island.[21] The data for 1899 reveal graphically that, contrary to the image of a smallholding agrarian society, the great majority of families did not own land in rural Puerto Rico at the close of the Spanish colonial period. More than 72 percent of all heads of households in rural areas did not own farms

yields a decreasing degree of concentration of land in farms of over 100 acres, from 72 percent in 1899 to 63 percent in 1910. Angel Quintero Rivera has argued similarly, "El proceso de distrubución de la propiedad agrícola agudizó en forma drástica la concentración de tierra que se había ido dando en el siglo xix." See "La clase obrera y el proceso político en Puerto Rico: El capitalismo y el proletariado rural," 62, and the appendix, 96–101, which explains the calculations used to analyze the agrarian social structure. This conclusion is erroneous in light of the increasing farm ownership that we have demonstrated. The census data indicate that the number of farms increased much faster than the number of families between 1899 and 1910.

20. Lillian Guerra, *Popular Expression and National Identity in Puerto Rico: The Struggle for Self, Community, and Nation* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1998), 29–30. Guerra's figures showing a decline of 21 percent in the number of farms owned by "white" owners and a catastrophic decline of 56 percent in the number of farms owned by "black or mulatto" owners between 1910 and 1920 resulted from the fact that the Census of 1920 did not count farms under three acres that produced less than one hundred dollars in cash crops. See U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920, Vol. VI, Pt. 3, Agriculture, Reports for States, with Statistics for Counties and a Summary for the United States and the North, South, and West: The Western States and Outlying Possessions* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1922), 385.

21. The margin of error in these calculations is undetermined because one family may have owned more than one farm, and these data were not included in the census report. Data for 1899 were extracted from *Report on the Census of Porto Rico, 1899*. Data for 1910 were taken from U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930: Outlying Territories and Possessions* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1932). For overall population data by municipal district, see p. 124, and on the urban population, p. 132. Average family size for 1910 is found on pp. 1209–21; the number of farms in each district, on pp. 994–99. The number of families owning land was calculated in three steps. First, the total rural population in each municipality was determined by subtracting the number of urban inhabitants from the total population. Second, the number of rural families was determined by dividing the total population by the average family size for each municipal district (listed in the documentation). Third, the number of families not owning land was determined by subtracting the number of farms in each district from the number of families in each district.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002387910001952X Published online by Cambridge University Press

in 1899, although there were significant regional variations (see figure 1).[22] While many of these landless families owned no land, an undetermined number had usufruct rights over small parcels as *agregados* (a resident labor force), renters, or sharecroppers or in other arrangements that exchanged their labor for land use.[23]

When these data on rural landlessness are compared with the situation prevailing in 1910, the striking changes contradict any and all previous analytical conclusions. Simply stated, the number of rural landless families declined significantly between 1899 and 1910 as a greater percentage of rural Puerto Ricans were able to achieve landownership. By 1910 landless families in rural areas had declined to 64 percent of all families, compared with 72 percent in 1899. The number of farms had increased by nearly 50 percent from 39,000 in 1899 to more than 58,000 in 1910, while the population rose by 17 percent from 953,000 to 1,118,000 over the same period.[24] Thus rural Puerto Rico was not a smallholder peasant society prior to the U.S. takeover, and opportunities for acquiring land improved markedly after 1898 as a greater share of rural Puerto Rican families were able to obtain farms of their own.

It should be kept in mind that in this first decade of U.S. rule, rural to urban migration was marginal and the percentage of the total population living in urban areas increased by only 3 percent (from 23 percent to 26 percent) between the 1899 and the 1910 censuses, according to municipal level data in both census tracts. Thus a generalized rural exodus was not the cause of improved land availability and acquisition opportunities for families living in rural areas. Improved opportunities for landownership may be linked to the expansion of the agricultural economy after 1898, the dynamics of sugar production in coastal zones, and tobacco and coffee cultivation in highland regions.

What of the supposed peasant displacement by absentee sugar corporations after 1898? In 1899, before the advent of Puerto Rico's modern sugar industry, the highest rates of rural landlessness were found in the future sugar-producing zones of the early twentieth century, with few sig-

22. To adjust for shifting municipal boundaries or the creation of new towns, the following *municipios* have been merged in the figure: Yauco and Guánica; Jayuya and Utuado; Río Piedras, Bayamón, Cataño, and Guaynabo; Juana Díaz and Villalba; Humacao and Las Piedras; Guayanilla and Peñuelas; Ciales and Orocovis (originally called Barros); Río Grande, Luquillo, Fajardo, and Ceiba; and Mayagüez and Hormigueros.

23. Based on a survey made by the Puerto Rican Department of Labor and Agriculture in 1924, Clark et al. argued, "On the whole the resident laborers on the sugar plantations, who make up the largest group total, have almost no land of their own, while laborers in the coffee and tobacco districts quite generally have an opportunity to raise some food." See Clark et al., *Porto Rico and Its Problems*, 29. The deterioration of usufruct rights on the coastal cane lands had already started in the first decade of the twentieth century.

24. Land in farms increased by 19 percent between 1899 and 1910, according to the census data, from 1,757,774 cuerdas to 2,085,162 cuerdas.

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nificant changes for the worse by 1910, after large U.S.-owned centrales were constructed. In Santa Isabel, with Central Aguirre established nearby in Salinas in 1901, nearly 90 percent of all rural families owned no land in 1899. This figure increased to 93.7 percent by 1910. In Fajardo, where the Fajardo Sugar Company controlled the local sugar economy, nearly 85 percent of all families owned no land in 1899, and this percentage actually declined to 76.7 percent in 1910 after Central Fajardo was constructed in 1905. In Guayama, where Central Machete controlled local sugar production, 82.8 percent of all rural families were landless in 1899, a level virtually unchanged at 82.3 percent in 1910.

Thus even in the most extreme regions of land concentration in early-twentieth-century Puerto Rico, the sugar plantation zones, the relative percentages of those with and without land changed little in the first decade of the twentieth century. Sugarcane cultivation did not replace an independent smallholding class of yeomen farmers. Nor was rural dispossession a consequence of the expanding twentieth-century sugar economy because most rural Puerto Ricans owned no land long before the U.S. Army disembarked in Guánica Bay in 1898. The unfolding process of proletarianization, in the sense of the incorporation of individuals as wage workers into the sugar economy, took place in a population that was already dispossessed. The conditions of wage earners working in rural endeavors (including sugar) and usufruct rights changed significantly in the first decade of the twentieth century, as dispossessed rural inhabitants relied more on their wages as their only source of income, while garden plots and usufruct rights succumbed to the expanding sugar fields. The deterioration of usufruct rights, however, is a process distinct from the dispossession of a supposed landowning yeomanry.

Land concentration ensued to some degree in specific sugar plantation regions after 1898, generally those where foreign capital was dominant. But this process was accomplished at the expense of a small sector of Puerto Rican rural society that owned land when the United States occupied the island in 1898, a major point ignored by much of the historical literature on the early twentieth century.[25] The terms and conditions of land transfers from Puerto Rico's landowning classes have not been examined in any detail. It is likely, however, that land, much of it of marginal value in 1898 because it was uncultivated, was converted into liquid capital to the advantage of those elite families who could then invest in other economic sectors stimulated by the growing economy.[26] The main point is that social and economic changes occurring in the early twentieth century did not lead to land alien-

25. See the works cited in notes 14 through 19.

26. Miguel Meléndez Muñoz refers to the "fabulous prices" for land offered by U.S. investors: "[La ofertas] eran fabulosas. Los yanquis estaban locos, trataban de reproducir en Puerto Rico la leyenda de El Dorado. ¿Cómo no iban a vender estos ilusos sus tierras, si les pagaban

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ation for most rural Puerto Ricans. That process had already occurred well before 1898.

We have focused on the question of rural landlessness in the sugar-producing regions since sugar became Puerto Rico's leading export product in the early twentieth century. But rural landholding patterns in every economic region of the island were characterized by pervasive landlessness for most Puerto Rican families prior to the U.S. takeover. In 1899 only in the western coastal districts of Aguada and Rincón—subsistence regions with no export crops in the late nineteenth century—did a majority of rural families own land. In most municipal districts, more than 70 percent of all families did not own land, and in coffee-producing Maricao, the situation resembled that in the coastal sugar districts, where more than 80 percent of families owned no land (see figure 1).

Figure 1 graphically depicts rural landlessness in 1899 and large U.S.-owned mills built between 1900 and 1910. A perusal of this map clearly indicates U.S. mills were established in areas with high preexisting rates of rural landlessness. The rise of a modern sugar economy in the south and eastern coastal regions of the island had little to do with increasing rates of rural dispossession. Only in Santa Isabel, close to Central Aguirre, did rates increase. In the northeast municipalities contiguous to Central Fajardo, landless rates declined in every municipal district. The same process may be observed in the crisis-plagued western highland coffee districts, which exhibited a decline in the proportion of landless families like that found in coastal sugar-producing regions, although the causes differed. Even in regions with higher population growth rates (such as Fajardo and Naguabo) or in the developing tobacco districts in the eastern center of the island (Comerío, Cayey, Aguas Buenas, Cidra, Caguas, Barranquitas, and Aibonito), the rate of landlessness declined between 1899 and 1910.[27]

LAND TENURE

Accompanying the decline in rural landlessness was an increase in the number of farms in all municipalities except Las Marías and Maricao,

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por ellas más de lo que valdrían, si contuvieran en sus entrañas grandes yacimientos de oro?" See Meléndez Muñoz, "Nuestra tierra se nos va," *Obras Completas*, 474. Ramón S. Corrada del Río discussed the real estate boom associated with the development of the Condado district and Santurce. It was fomented by local landowners connected to modernizing corporations through alliances with the Behn brothers, who established International Telephone and Telegraph. See Corrada del Río, "The Historical-Geographical Development of Santurce, 1582–1939," Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1995.

27. The beginning of population exodus from the traditional coffee-producing districts of Utuado, Adjuntas, Las Marías, and Maricao may be noted on this figure. These municipalities, as well as Peñuelas, experienced population decline in these years, although the reduction in the patterns of rural landlessness was about the same as that experienced elsewhere.

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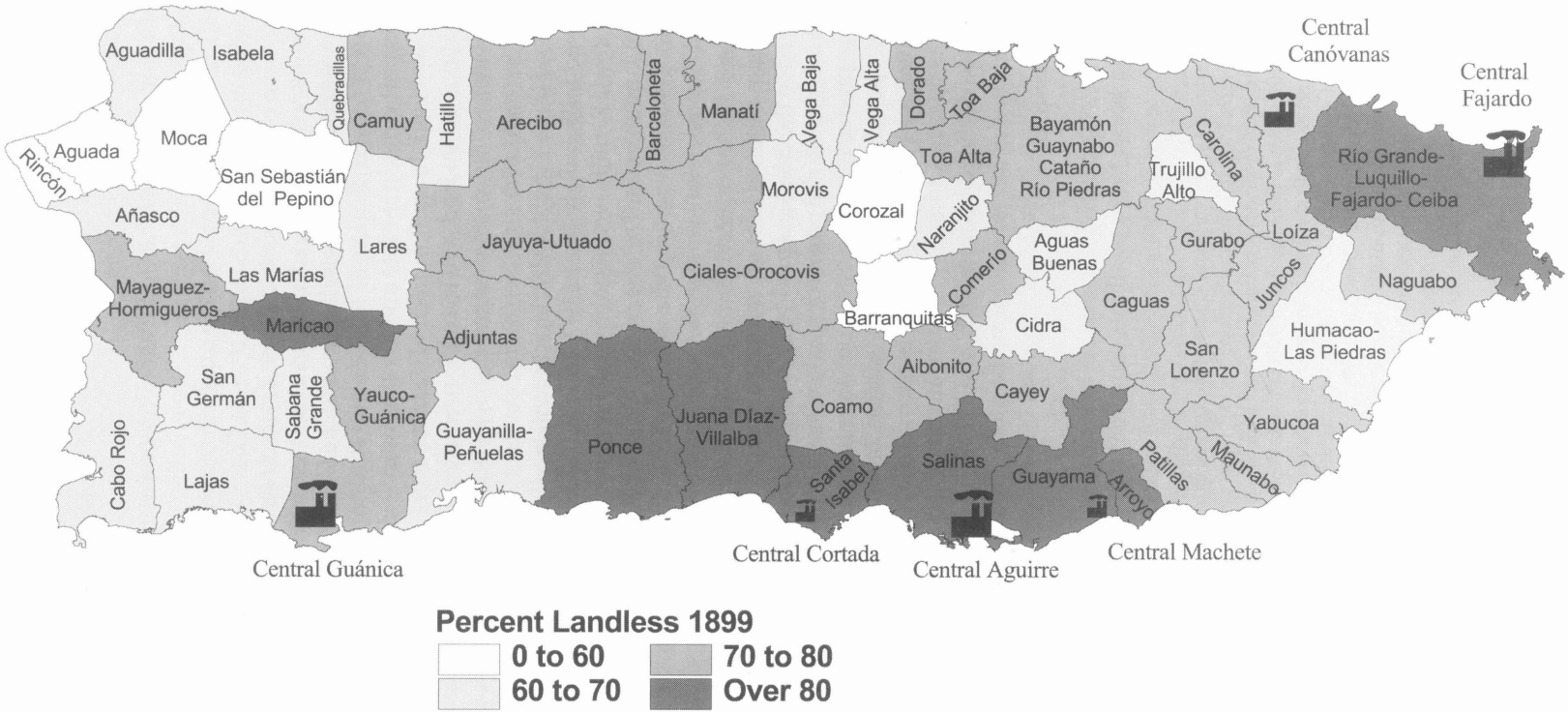

Figure 1 Rates of landlessness in rural Puerto Rico as calculated from the Census of 1899. The sugar mills shown were established in 1900–1910.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002387910001952X Published online by Cambridge University Press

two monocultural coffee districts in the nineteenth century that experienced a decrease in farms as the coffee sector contracted. The highest rates of farm increase occurred in coastal regions of the island, where the sugar economy developed rapidly.[28] Municipal districts from Ponce to Arroyo on the south coast, cane-growing municipalities on the east coast from Patillas in the south to Fajardo in the north, and districts along the entire north coast from Río Grande in the east to Aguadilla in the extreme northwest all experienced increases in the number of total farms between 1899 and 1910 of well over 60 percent.

The increasing number of farms in the sugar-producing regions of coastal Puerto Rico was linked to significant changes in production in the sugar industry. Cane-growing was decentralized through the development of the *colono* system of production, in which large and small producers supplied mills of all sizes with cane. This system fostered the proliferation of numerous farms specializing in sugarcane cultivation. Many colonos were independent landowners, some of large estates, while others worked on leased land or in sharecropping arrangements with mill owners.

A comparison of three municipalities central to the early-twentieth-century sugar industry is revealing. The largest cane-growing municipality on the island was Arecibo, where Puerto Rican capital controlled the local industry.[29] Between 1899 and 1910, the number of farms increased by 41 percent from 1,448 to 2,044, while average farm size declined from 48 to 39 *cuerdas* per farm.[30] In Yauco, a municipality of mixed economic structure where Central Guánica was located in the coastal barrio of the same name, the number of farms increased by 50 percent between 1899 and 1910, while

28. Acreage planted in sugarcane doubled between 1899 and 1910, from 72,146 to 145,433 cuerdas. See *Report on the Census of Porto Rico, 1899*, 356; and U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States: Volume VII, Agriculture, 1909 and 1910, Reports by States, with Statistics for Counties: Nebraska-Wyoming, Alaska, Hawaii, and Porto Rico* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1913), 1006.

29. Central Cambalache in Arecibo, the fourth-largest mill in Puerto Rico in output, belonged to the principal local group of sugar mill owners known as el Grupo Fabián ("the Spanish group") because some of its members were Spaniards who refused to become U.S. citizens after 1917. They were also called "los barones del azúcar." Juan Giusti asserted that "the Spanish Group" was "the most compact expression of Puerto Rico's 'native planter class' in the early twentieth century." See Giusti, "Labor, Ecology, and History in a Caribbean Sugar Plantation Region: Piñones (Loíza), Puerto Rico, 1770–1950," Ph.D. diss., SUNY-Binghamton, 1994, 482. The main figure in this group, Eduardo Georgetti, was a prominent leader of the autonomist Partido Unión, president of the Plazuela and Florida sugar companies, and a director of the Central Cambalache company and the Banco Territorial y Agrícola de Puerto Rico. Georgetti was a native Puerto Rican. Giusti also argued, "in most of the regions of Puerto Rico where sugar centrals existed before 1898, U.S. capital did not enter at all" (p. 492). On the prosperity of the local mill owners of Puerto Rico under the U.S. regime, see 481–521.

30. *Report on the Census of Porto Rico, 1899*, 352; and *Thirteenth Census of the United States: Volume VII*, 994.

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average farm size declined from 49 to 38 cuerdas. Finally, in Fajardo, a municipal district revolving around sugar cultivation where the Fajardo Sugar Company controlled sugar manufacture, the number of farms rose by 79 percent between 1899 and 1910 from 397 to 712 farms. Over the same time period, average farm size declined from 81 to 57 cuerdas. The significance of comparative changes in patterns of landownership in these sugar-producing zones should be emphasized. Similar processes may be observed in all three municipal districts, including one controlled entirely by domestic capital (Arecibo). The number of farms increased, mean farm size declined considerably, and rural landlessness decreased.[31] In all three regions, the proliferating colono system of cane production was in all likelihood the reason for these three interrelated phenomena.

This pattern of declining average farm size during the first decade of the twentieth century was common in the major sugarcane-growing municipal districts of the island, with several exceptions. Table 1 indicates average farm sizes between 1899 and 1910 for the fifteen largest cane-growing regions in 1910.[32]

With the exceptions of Vieques, Guayama, Arroyo, and Ponce, farm size fell, averaging a decline of nearly 8 percent from 72 to 66 cuerdas in these largest cane-growing districts between 1899 and 1910. But even this figure is somewhat misleading because of the statistical distortions introduced by including Vieques. The land-tenure pattern on that island was concentrated to a degree inconsistent with patterns found in the rest of Puerto Rico. If Vieques is eliminated from statistical calculations, the average size of holdings in the fourteen major sugar-producing municipalities of the island decreased from 61.4 cuerdas in 1899, to 50.9 cuerdas in 1910, a decline of 17 percent.[33]

The reasons for reduced average farm size between 1899 and 1910, whether Vieques is included in calculations or not, were related to the development of cane-growing as a specialized activity. Division of the sugar industry's structure into properties that both grew cane and produced sugar in mills with varying technological capabilities and farms exclusively cultivating cane that was sold to milling operations in numerous economic arrangements favored smaller units of production. Economies of scale were not mandatory for sugarcane production exclusively, and farms of all sizes

31. In Arecibo landlessness declined from 74 percent to 69 percent of all rural families between 1899 and 1910; in Yauco the corresponding decline was 73 percent to 68 percent; and in Fajardo, landless families decreased from 85 percent to 77 percent in these years.

32. These fifteen districts accounted for 57 percent of the sugarcane grown in Puerto Rico in 1910.

33. Vieques had a total of only 113 farms in 1910, compared with 2,044 farms in Arecibo. The average farm sizes were surprisingly similar to those found in the largest tobacco- and coffee-growing districts in 1910.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002387910001952X Published online by Cambridge University Press

TABLE 1 Sugarcane Cultivation and Production in Puerto Rico in 1910 in the Fifteen Largest Producing Municipalities

Municipality	Sugarcane				Average Farm Size		Change	
	Acres	(%)	Tons	(%)	1899 Acres	1910 Acres	Absolute	(%)
Arecibo	9,800	(6.7)	219,428	(6.9)	48.3	39.1	-9.2	(-19.1)
Yauco	7,547	(5.2)	169,305	(5.3)	49.3	37.8	-11.5	(-23.3)
Vieques	7,222	(5.0)	172,525	(5.4)	215.1	276.9	61.8	(28.7)
Ponce	6,198	(4.3)	180,885	(5.7)	68.6	69.4	0.8	(1.1)
Mayagüez	6,067	(4.2)	107,160	(3.4)	27.3	26.6	-0.7	(-2.5)
Cabo Rojo	5,970	(4.1)	103,218	(3.2)	39.4	30.8	-8.6	(-21.8)
Fajardo	5,464	(3.8)	116,051	(3.6)	81.2	56.7	-24.5	(-30.1)
Humacao	5,344	(3.7)	94,876	(3.0)	39.9	24.9	-15.0	(-37.7)
Juana Día	4,614	(3.2)	124,337	(3.9)	56.8	41.3	-15.5	(-27.3)
Salinas	4,380	(3.0)	104,165	(3.3)	209.7	129.2	-80.5	(-38.4)
Guayama	4,242	(2.9)	100,243	(3.2)	80.0	106.7	26.7	(33.4)
Añasco	4,140	(2.8)	83,244	(2.6)	28.9	27.3	-1.6	(-5.4)
San Germán	4,087	(2.8)	56,523	(1.8)	22.0	19.7	-2.3	(-10.4)
Yabucoa	3,827	(2.6)	80,066	(2.5)	45.8	30.6	-15.2	(-33.2)
Arroyo	3,507	(2.4)	92,529	(2.9)	62.0	71.9	9.9	(15.9)
Totals	82,409	(56.7)	1,804,555	(56.7)	71.6[a]	65.9[a]	-5.7[a]	(-7.9)[a]

Source: 1910 U.S. Census, t. 4, p. 1006.

NOTE: If Vieques is eliminated, the average farm size in 1899 was 61.4 acres and 50.9 in 1910, an absolute change of -10.5 (-17.1%). If Vieques and Salinas are eliminated, the average farm size in 1899 was 50.0 and 44.8 in 1910, an absolute change of -5.1 (10.3%).
[a] Averages for the fifteen largest cane-producing municipios.

could take advantage of the new and dynamically expanding market for cane ushered in by the modernization of milling after 1898, an unsuccessful process during the second half of the nineteenth century on the island. In many ways, Puerto Rican sugar production during the early twentieth century experienced the same kinds of structural transformations found in the Cuban sugar industry during the second half of the nineteenth century, when the *colonato* emerged as a highly stratified class of specialized cane-growing farmers who sold their product to increasingly sophisticated and capital-intensive milling operations.[34]

A main point to be noted is that land in early-twentieth-century Puerto Rican sugar districts had been highly concentrated at the close of the Spanish colonial period. The accumulation of land and concentration of owner-

34. On the emergence of the Cuban *colonato*, see Fe Iglesias García, *Del ingenio al central* (San Juan: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1998); and Laird W. Bergad, *Cuban Rural Society in the Nineteenth Century: The Social and Economic History of Monoculture in Matanzas* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990).

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ship were not produced by the first fifteen years of U.S. colonial control, as has been assumed by most prior studies. This finding does not mean, however, that U.S. owned corporations did not accumulate land. It is well known that in order to guarantee cane supplies in a competitive economic environment, they sought land control through purchase or lease arrangements.[35] But this process, while impressive in particular regions, did not shift the overall land-tenure structure toward highly concentrated holdings, at least not before 1915.

The number of farms increased in coastal regions linked to expanding sugarcane production and sugar manufacture but also in developing tobacco-growing municipalities in the eastern highland regions of the island, where local rural economies expanded because of the cigar manufacturing industry. Stimulated by investments from the Porto Rican–American Tobacco Company, which moved to the island in 1899 and offered a new and expanding market for leaf and filler, acreage planted in tobacco quadrupled between 1899 and 1910.[36] This growth was concentrated in municipalities contiguous to San Lorenzo and Juncos in the east, running west to Barranquitas and Corozal in the center of the island.

The spread of tobacco led to more farms but also to a decrease in mean farm size in the first decade of the twentieth century, despite some excep-

35. According to a Fajardo Sugar Company memo, "It is not necessary for a central to own all the land required for its supply of cane, nor is such a method practiced, but it should own a certain percentage, to ensure against failure in case planters of the lands accessible to that central should divert them into the production of cattle, fruit, tobacco, or some other product, which they would be very apt to do should the low price of sugar, or a change in tariff rates, or any one of many other causes make the production of something else more profitable. Previous to 1900, a great deal of land now planted in sugarcane was used for grazing because due to the tariff rates, it was very profitable to raise cattle for export to Cuba and the French and English West Indies; and this might well happen again. We can very well imagine circumstances where although there might be a fair profit in the raising of sugarcane, there would be much more profit in producing something else. Thus the colono, with no capital invested in expensive machinery and absolutely nothing to lose by the change, might stop supplying cane to the factory at any time, leaving it stranded with a great amount of capital invested in machinery, buildings, and railroads and with no cane to grind, bankrupt." See Fajardo Sugar Company, "Memorandum concerning Bill to Provide Civil Government for Porto Rico, Introduced in the House of Representatives, March Fifteenth, Nineteen Hundred and Ten, being No. 23,000," p. 18, in U.S. National Archives, Record Group 350, File 422. The Fajardo Sugar Company acquired land in eastern Puerto Rico mainly through buying existing cane haciendas. See Luis Medina Mercado, "El proceso de acumulación de tierras ocasionado por el desarrollo del capital industrial azucarero: El caso de la Fajardo Sugar," M.A. thesis, University of Puerto Rico, 1987.

36. Some 5,963 cuerdas of tobacco were planted in 1899 and 22,142 cuerdas, producing 10,827,755 pounds of tobacco valued at $1,938,092 in 1910. Data for 1899 are found in *Report on the Census of Porto Rico, 1899*, 356. Figures for 1910 are from *Thirteenth Census of the United States: Volume VII*, 994. The value of leaf tobacco exports rose from $375,000 in 1901 to $1,258,317 in 1910, while cigar exports rose from 12,000,000 to 150,000,000 cigars valued at $306,000 in 1901 and $4,480,000 in 1910. See Clark et al., *Porto Rico and Its Problems*, 606.

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tions. Tobacco cultivation requires great care in that seedlings must be carefully planted each year under shade trees (or more commonly, shade cloth), which may only be removed when the plants are hardy enough to withstand direct exposure to the sun. Caguas, Comerío, and Cayey recorded the greatest acreage sown in tobacco in 1910, accounting for about 30 percent of all tobacco land in Puerto Rico.

These municipalities' patterns of rural development were somewhat similar to those found in the sugar-producing municipalities with respect to farm proliferation. Caguas, the largest tobacco-growing municipality on the island, experienced the most radical change as the number of farms increased 57 percent between 1899 and 1910 from 567 to 892, while average farm size declined from 60 to 50 cuerdas. Declining average farm size also occurred in Comerío (from 56 to 44 cuerdas), although the percentage increase in the overall number of farms was less dramatic (26 percent) than in Caguas. Cayey was one of the few island municipalities where mean farm size increased (from 51 to 58 cuerdas), and farm numbers rose less (by 16 percent) than in Comerío and Caguas. The reasons for this departure from patterns prevalent elsewhere are not known. Nevertheless, the tobacco region as a whole experienced processes similar to those found in sugarcane-growing districts: increasing numbers of farms, decreasing average farm size (except in Cayey), and decreasing numbers of landless families. In Puerto Rico's fifteen largest tobacco-growing municipal districts in 1910, average farm size had decreased by 19 percent between 1899 and 1910, from 49 to 40 cuerdas (see table 2).

Coffee cultivation in the early twentieth century, Puerto Rico's third major export crop, continued to be concentrated in the same municipal districts where the coffee boom had been centered in the last half of the nineteenth century. Utuado, Lares, and Mayagüez produced the most coffee in Puerto Rico in 1910. Mayagüez was also a leading sugarcane producer, and Utuado was a center of tobacco cultivation as well. In the fifteen leading coffee municipalities, average farm sizes did not decrease as dramatically as in the newly developing sugar- and tobacco-producing zones of the island (see table 3). Between 1899 and 1910, average farm size fell only marginally, from 49.8 to 46.5 cuerdas. In some municipal districts, the drop was more notable, especially in Utuado with a decline from 60.2 to 44.3 cuerdas, but there it may be associated with proliferating tobacco farms. The coffee zone experienced radical economic contraction in the aftermath of San Ciriaco, the devastating hurricane of August 1899, because of the secular decline in coffee prices on the international market after 1896, and due to the loss of European markets after 1898. But it is apparent that despite economic contraction, landholding structures had been consolidated in the coffee boom of the late nineteenth century and did not undergo the kinds of significant changes found in the renewed and expanding economic zones of sugar production along the coast or in the eastern highland tobacco districts. This dif-

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TABLE 2 *Tobacco Cultivation and Production in Puerto Rico in 1910 in the Fifteen Largest Producing Municipalities*

Municipality	Tobacco				Average Farm Size		Change	
	Acres	(%)	Tons	(%)	1899 Acres	1910 Acres	Absolute	(%)
Caguas	3,496	(15.8)	1,974,900	(18.2)	60.4	49.5	-10.9	(-18.0)
Cayey	1,570	(7.1)	880,800	(8.1)	51.0	57.9	6.9	(13.6)
Comerío	1,322	(6.0)	528,600	(4.9)	56.2	44.3	-11.9	(-21.2)
Isabela	1,244	(5.6)	779,400	(7.2)	32.8	21.3	-11.5	(-35.1)
Arecibo	1,049	(4.7)	758,200	(7.0)	48.3	39.1	-9.2	(-19.1)
Aibonito	1,182	(5.3)	653,000	(6.0)	47.3	44.9	-2.4	(-5.0)
Juncos	911	(4.1)	496,900	(4.6)	43.5	48.9	5.4	(12.5)
Cidra	882	(4.0)	410,000	(3.8)	46.1	25.2	-20.9	(-45.3)
Hatillo	647	(2.9)	389,100	(3.6)	41.5	30.0	-11.5	(-27.7)
Utuado	756	(3.4)	383,200	(3.5)	60.2	44.3	-15.9	(-26.5)
Humacao	527	(2.4)	281,875	(2.6)	39.9	24.9	-15.0	(-37.7)
Camuy	411	(1.9)	230,700	(2.1)	44.6	29.5	-15.1	(-33.8)
Juana Díaz	332	(1.5)	185,100	(1.7)	56.8	41.3	-15.5	(-27.3)
Coamo	342	(1.5)	184,000	(1.7)	59.9	56.3	-3.6	(-6.0)
Yauco	669	(3.0)	182,985	(1.7)	49.3	37.8	-11.5	(-23.3)
Totals	15,340	(69.3)	8,318,760	(76.7)	49.2[a]	39.7[a]	-9.5[a]	(-19.3)[a]

[a] Averages and percentage of change for the fifteen largest tobacco-producing municipios.

ferent degree of change found in the coffee districts highlights the fact that the U.S. occupation of 1898 did not uniformly transform rural social structure in every region of Puerto Rico (see table 3).

Land-tenure patterns in sugar municipalities, however, differed markedly from those found in tobacco or coffee districts in 1910, and they defy all prior generalizations about the island's sugar industry. Surprisingly, land was not as heavily concentrated as the image of the developing plantation economy would suggest. In Arecibo and Fajardo, for example, over half of all farms were smaller than 10 cuerdas in size. In Yauco 67 percent of farms fell into this category, although these data include highland coffee and subsistence farm districts. In the fifteen largest sugar-producing municipal districts, 70 percent of all farms were smaller than 10 cuerdas in 1910, although the census does not indicate the degree of land control for each tenure grouping. Nevertheless, the fractionalizing of land by 1910 was most extreme in the coastal regions, where the sugar economy was growing dynamically, again a clear result of the proliferation of cane-growing farms.

It is striking that in the three tobacco districts considered previously, fewer smaller farms were found proportionally. In Caguas and Cayey, less than 40 percent of all farms were under 10 cuerdas in extension, as were 30

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TABLE 3 Coffee Cultivation and Production in Puerto Rico in 1910 in the Fifteen Largest Producing Municipalities

Municipality	Coffee				Average Farm Size		Change	
	Acres	(%)	Tons	(%)	1899 Acres	1910 Acres	Absolute	(%)
Utuado	22,596	(12.1)	6,936,000	(13.2)	60.2	44.3	-15.9	(-26.5)
Lares	15,095	(8.1)	3,998,500	(7.6)	38.4	31.3	-7.1	(-18.4)
Mayagüez	12,639	(6.8)	3,988,450	(7.6)	27.3	26.6	-0.7	(-2.5)
Adjuntas	12,496	(6.7)	3,591,000	(6.8)	57.8	46.9	-10.9	(-18.8)
Las Marías	12,009	(6.4)	3,271,350	(6.2)	46.9	49.4	2.5	(5.4)
Maricao	10,532	(5.6)	2,927,300	(5.6)	85.5	110.6	25.1	(29.4)
San Sebastián	10,091	(5.4)	2,101,300	(4.0)	38.1	34.0	-4.1	(-10.9)
Ponce	8,850	(4.7)	2,930,800	(5.6)	68.6	69.4	0.8	(1.1)
Ciales	8,256	(4.4)	2,317,700	(4.4)	57.1	44.7	-12.4	(-21.7)
Yauco	5,622	(3.0)	1,683,395	(3.2)	49.3	37.8	-11.5	(-23.3)
Añasco	5,257	(2.8)	1,259,100	(2.4)	28.9	27.3	-1.6	(-5.4)
Juana Díaz	5,026	(2.7)	1,578,225	(3.0)	56.8	41.3	-15.5	(-27.3)
San Germán	4,185	(2.2)	1,346,675	(2.6)	22.0	19.7	-2.3	(-10.4)
Cayey	3,831	(2.1)	715,300	(1.4)	51.0	57.9	6.9	(13.6)
Coamo	3,807	(2.0)	891,600	(1.7)	59.9	56.3	-3.6	(-6.0)
Totals	140,292	(75.0)	39,536,695	(75.3)	49.8[a]	46.5[a]	-3.3[a]	(-6.7)[a]

[a] Averages for the fifteen largest coffee-producing municipios.

percent in Comerío. In the largest tobacco-growing municipalities in 1910, half of all farms were under 10 cuerdas in extension, indicating less land fractionalization than in the sugar municipios and a pattern closer to land-tenure structures prevailing in the most important coffee districts. In these regions, mostly concentrated in the western highlands, 47 percent of rural properties were under 10 cuerdas (see table 4).

The other end of the ownership spectrum showed similar percentages of larger farms in sugar- and tobacco-producing districts, which may be contrasted with patterns found in the coffee zones. Farms over 100 cuerdas in extension accounted for 6 percent of all farms in the sugar districts and less than 7 percent in the tobacco-growing municipalities. These similarities should not be exaggerated, however, and do not reflect the concentration of landholding by the largest sugar centrales. But they do indicate the impact on land-tenure patterns of the decentralization taking place in cane growing. This trend favored fragmentation of land in the sugarcane-producing municipalities and offered opportunities for small-scale farmers to reap economic benefits from the rapidly expanding sugar industry much like those found in the tobacco zones. Surprisingly, a greater portion of farms 100 cuerdas or larger were found in the coffee-growing districts of the west-

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TABLE 4 *Land-Tenure Structure in the Largest Sugar, Tobacco, and Coffee Districts in Puerto Rico in 1910*

	Largest Sugar Municipalities		Largest Tobacco Municipalities		Largest Coffee Municipalities	
Acreage	*Farms*	*(%)*	*Farms*	*(%)*	*Farms*	*(%)*
Under 5	6,634	(40.6)	2,668	(30.8)	2,488	(28.4)
5 to 9	3,081	(18.9)	1,740	(20.1)	1,648	(18.8)
10 to 19	2,519	(15.4)	1,553	(17.9)	1,572	(17.9)
20 to 49	2,121	(13.0)	1,516	(17.5)	1,503	(17.2)
50 to 99	923	(5.7)	624	(7.2)	700	(8.0)
100 to 174	435	(2.7)	281	(3.2)	365	(4.2)
175 to 499	419	(2.6)	216	(2.5)	378	(4.3)
500 to 999	104	(0.6)	50	(0.6)	74	(0.8)
1,000+	88	(0.5)	19	(0.2)	33	(0.4)
Total	16,324	(100.0)	8,667	(100.0)	8,761	(100.0)

NOTE: We have eliminated overlapping districts in which two crops were among the fifteen largest producing muicipalities for each crop. The municipal districts included for sugar are Arecibo, Yauco, Vieques, Ponce, Mayagüez, Cabo Rojo, Fajardo, Humacao, Juana Díaz, Salinas, Guayama, Añasco, San Germán, Yabucoa, and Arroyo. The tobacco districts included are Caguas, Cayey, Isabela, Aibonico, Comerío, Juncos, Cidra, Hatillo, Humacao, and Camuy. The coffee districts are Utuado, Lares, Adjuntas, Las Marías, Maricao, San Sebastián, Ciales, and Coamo.

ern highlands in 1910 (10 percent) than in sugar or tobacco regions. This pattern reflected land-tenure conditions existing in the nineteenth-century coffee boom, which were not terribly disrupted in the early twentieth century, despite the downturn in the coffee economy starting in 1896.

The finding that a similar percentage of smaller farms were found in the largest tobacco-growing districts of the island when compared with sugar zones simply underlines analysts' inability to make sweeping generalizations about landholding patterns in early-twentieth-century Puerto Rico, despite frequent attempts in the literature. Tobacco has always been associated with small-scale production, and it is apparent that cane production took place on small farms as well as large farms under the administration of mills, despite the strong association of the sugar economy with large plantations. Additionally, the similar frequency of farms over 100 cuerdas in the largest tobacco-producing districts and the greatest cane-growing municipalities also reveals the difficulty of making assumptions about the impact of different crops on island rural society in the early twentieth century.

The censuses of 1899 and 1910 offer data on the numbers of farms in general size categories for each municipal district on the island. They do not, however, provide data on the total land area controlled by properties of various sizes, and this kind of information is essential if patterns of concentration and fragmentation of landholding are to be measured among land-

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TABLE 5 Gini Indexes of Inequality for Land holding in Ten Puerto Rican Municipal Districts, 1905–1915

Municipality	*1905*	*1915*
Aguas Buenas	0.51	0.44
Utuado	0.56	0.60
Cayey	0.56	0.59
Humacao	0.57	0.58
San Germán	0.60	0.60
Lares	0.62	0.65
Manatí	0.62	0.69
Fajardo	0.69	0.70
Yauco	0.74	0.72
Santa Isabel	0.82	0.76

holders.[37] While the census data make evident that small farms were typical in zones producing the three principal commercial crops in Puerto Rico, the degree of land concentration among larger farms is not revealed. The Archivo General de Puerto Rico, however, houses a vast collection of tax lists year by year for each municipal district for the years 1905 to 1955. These lists note all types of property, rural and urban, and when rural farms are indicated, the size is noted. We have selected ten municipalities to study that represent different economic zones and have constructed a database on every farm in them for the years 1905 and 1915.[38] This approach permits more complete examination of land concentration or fragmentation from regional perspectives on the island.

Relative patterns of land concentration may be measured using the Gini index of inequality. This index ranges from 0 to 1, with the higher numbers indicating greater concentration of measurable wealth, in this case, land. Table 5 indicates the range of indexes found in the municipal districts we examined. They are presented in rank order from lowest to highest for 1905.

It is not extraordinary to find great variation according to region and dominant economic activity, and these data must be examined in relation to the census data for 1910 already discussed. The sugarcane-producing district of Santa Isabel exhibited the greatest concentration of land in larger

37. The census provides summary data on the area occupied by each size category, and these have been cited repeatedly by all studies on early-twentieth-century Puerto Rico. These data are for the entire island, however, and may not be used to generalize about landholding patterns prevailing in different regions.

38. Archivo General de Puerto Rico, Departamento de Hacienda, Registros de Tasación y Contribución sobre la Propiedad. We have computerized all the entries for Aguas Buenas, Utuado, Cayey, Humacao, San Germán, Lares, Manatí, Fajardo, Yauco, and Santa Isabel in the years 1905 and 1915. Altogether, the database contains 11,383 properties in 1905 and 16,103 in 1915.

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holdings in both 1905 and 1915, although the index declined by 1915, indicating slightly diminishing land concentration over the decade. This finding is somewhat surprising because a fundamental assumption about the sugar economy has been that land became progressively more concentrated in the hands of absentee companies in the first three decades after the U.S. occupation. The census data confirm that average farm size in Santa Isabel actually fell from 203 cuerdas to 163 cuerdas between 1899 and 1910.[39] Thus the Gini indexes for 1905 and 1915 indicate reduced land concentration, while the census data confirm this process by underscoring the land fragmentation occurring in Santa Isabel.

Fajardo, the other sugar-growing district for which data were collected in 1905 and 1915, exhibited nearly complete stability in land concentration: the Gini indexes in both years hardly changed (.69 in 1905 and .70 in 1915). In Fajardo, as in Santa Isabel, average farm size declined sharply between 1899 and 1910 from 81.2 to 51.7 cuerdas.

In other economic regions, land was more equitably distributed in comparative perspective, with no evidence of land accumulation after 1898. For example, in Aguas Buenas, a tobacco-growing district typified by numerous small farms, significantly less land concentration occurred than in Santa Isabel or other sugar municipalities such as Fajardo, Yauco, or even Manatí. Moreover, tenure patterns became more equitable by 1915, the Gini index falling significantly from .51 to .44.

The structure of the tobacco economy was similar to that of sugar production in that independent producers owning or leasing relatively small farms, nearly all Puerto Ricans, produced both cane and tobacco. Tobacco growers depended on a virtual monopsony for the marketing of leaf. Sugarcane growers, in contrast, sold to a large number of mills in different geographical regions along the coast, most of them owned by Puerto Ricans, others owned by absentee corporations.[40]

CONCLUSIONS

The vision of early-twentieth-century Puerto Rico and the social and economic impact of the U.S. occupation of 1898 on rural Puerto Ricans has been shaped by the scholarly literature of two distinct periods. The first appeared during the social, economic, and political crisis of the 1930s ushered in by the Great Depression. Crises usually provoke reflection on the factors

39. It should be noted that Santa Isabel was the Puerto Rican municipality with the second-largest average farm size in 1910, after Vieques, with 277 cuerdas per farm average.

40. Juan José Baldrich, *Sembraron la no siembra: Los cosecheros de tabaco puertorriqueños frente a las corporaciones tabacaleras, 1920–1934* (Río Piedras, P.R.: Huracán, 1988); and Juan José Baldrich, "Gender and the Decomposition of the Cigar-Making Craft in Puerto Rico, 1899–1934," in *Puerto Rican Women's History*, edited by Delgado and Matos, 105–25.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002387910001952X Published online by Cambridge University Press

leading to them. Widespread unemployment, increasing poverty, and the hunger experienced in Puerto Rico along with the economic downturn in the sugar industry after 1921 (accentuated after 1929) led some island and U.S. intellectuals to reevaluate the impact of U.S. colonial rule after 1898. The two most visible symbols of that control were the structures of the colonial government and the leading role of the four big U.S. corporations in developing the sugar economy in the first three decades of the twentieth century.

Without doubt, these companies established control over land and society in the regions where they operated. But the social and economic structures created in these zones of absentee domination were erroneously used by the literature of the 1930s as paradigms to apply to all rural Puerto Rico, regardless of region, specific economic structure, or time period. Nuances were dismissed in favor of sweeping generalizations. However dreadful the suffering experienced during the 1930s, it should not be the optic through which rural Puerto Rican history is examined earlier in the century. The factors shaping rural society differed in the period before World War I, when rapid economic expansion created a series of opportunities for rural households that seized such advantages when possible by cultivating crops with guaranteed expanding markets, mainly cane and tobacco leaf.

This dominant view of the early years of U.S. colonialism took shape during the 1930s in the context of social and economic struggles by small farmers and urban and rural workers as well as generalized cultural struggles of national affirmation, such as the battle to retain Spanish as the language of instruction in public schools.[41] The struggles of the 1930s were marked by the rise of anti-U.S. nationalist sentiment across the political spectrum. At the same time, the era of Spanish colonialism began to be idealized as a period in which Puerto Rico had achieved political autonomy (in 1897), and one in which landownership was widespread. The nationalist critique of social and economic conditions in the 1930s focused almost exclusively on external colonial issues and downplayed or ignored internal social and economic contradictions. The complexities of twentieth-century colonial society were reduced to its two poles: monopolistic absentee capital at one extreme and an impoverished rural proletariat at the other. Politically, the economic crisis generated multiple responses to the problem of sugar monoculture: a general strike of sugarcane workers in 1934 on the heels of the Cuban Revolution of 1933; the formulation of the "Chardón Plan," in 1934; and the founding of the Partido Popular Democrático in 1938 in a program of "Pan, tierra, libertad."[42]

41. See, for example, Aida Negrón de Montilla, *La americanización de Puerto Rico y el sistema de instrucción pública, 1900–1930*, 2d ed. (Río Piedras: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1990).

42. The "Chardón Plan" formulated by the president of the University of Puerto Rico was

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The most extreme expression of idealization of the past was that of Pedro Albizu Campos, leader of the Partido Nationalista Puertorriqueño, who referred to "la vieja felicidad colectiva" and "la legión de propietarios" who supposedly had existed before 1898. In one way or another, this idealized nationalist prism diffusing the past colored the perception of all political and intellectual sectors, with some notable exceptions.[43] The Nationalists spoke nostalgically of a pre-1898 legion of fifty thousand proprietors, while the Liberales alluded to forty thousand property owners who had disappeared. The Socialists criticized the excessive landholdings of foreign corporations and the supposed expropriation of small producers. The idea of the disappeared "legion of proprietors" came to be broadly shared by sectors across the political spectrum, and it became a virtual national myth as well among Puerto Ricans.[44] Few recognized that in the first fifteen years of the U.S. colonial period, along with massive agro-industrial investments, a considerable number of medium and small farmers had acquired farms and that the incidence of landownership for rural households had increased.

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an economic plan to eliminate sugar monoculture and industrialize the island. The plan eventually became the cornerstone of the thinking of the Partido Popular Democrático (PPD). After World War II, the PPD undertook the dismantling of the sugar economy, a modest program of agrarian reform, and industrialization of the island, all within the colonial framework.

43. An exception to the literature asserting the myth of a golden age of the small farmer is the work of nationalist writer José Enamorado Cuesta, who admitted that widespread landlessness "has subsisted for many years, and was already there under Spanish rule." See Enamorado Cuesta, *Porto Rico: Past and Present* (New York: Arno, 1975; first published in 1929), 118. An incisive observer who later fought for the Republic during the Spanish Civil War, Enamorado Cuesta remained a staunch Puerto Rican anti-colonialist throughout his life. This perspective is evident in his subsequent books: *El imperialismo yanqui y la revolución en el Caribe* (San Juan de Puerto Rico: Campos, 1936); *Puerto Rico se nacionaliza, no se "Americaniza"* (San Juan de Puerto Rico: Puerto Rico Libre, 1970); *Puerto Rico (Borinquen) bajo el talón del aguila norteña (la distorsión cultural de Puerto Rico bajo la ocupación norteamericana)* (San Juan: Puerto Rico Libre, 1972).

44. A few examples will illustrate this point: "Con la *bolsa*, con el poder eminentemente político de la *bolsa*, por lo que tiene de eminentemente económico, es que los patronos extranjeros están capturando ya casi la mayor parte de la tierra puertorriqueña, sujetando a crecientes tributos a cuantos tenemos necesidad da habitar y vivir en ella" (emphasis in original). See *Cláusulas de incorporación de la asociación económico-política denominada Partido de la Independencia de Puerto Rico* (San Juan: Tipografía Real Hermanos, 1912), reprinted in Reece B. Bothwell González, *Puerto Rico: Cien años de lucha política, Tomo 1 (Programas y manifiestos, 1869–1952)* (Río Piedras: Editorial Universitaria, 1979), 305–33, 323–24. According to Zeno, "Las corporaciones acaparadoras de las tierras más fértiles de la isla han desplazado y continúan desplazando al pequeño terrateniente, que termina, sin remedio, por ir a engrosar las filas de los proletariados agrícolas, como un competidor más de estos en la lucha por la subsistencia. El 80 por ciento de los pequeños propietarios de hace veintisiete años, se ha convertido también en peonaje con el aporte de su parentela." See Zeno, *Influencia de la industria azucarera*, 116. Finally, "Denunciamos la triste condición a que ha quedado reducido nuestro pueblo bajo el actual estado de cosas, habiendo desaparecido ya más de cuarenta mil pequeños terratenientes." See "Programa político del Partido Liberal," *El Mundo*, 14–15 Mar. 1932, reprinted in Bothwell González, *Puerto Rico: Cien años*, 1:491–94, 492.

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The second period of intellectual ferment that examined the early-twentieth-century history of the island occurred in the 1970s with the advent of "la nueva historiografía" in Puerto Rico. This body of work was produced by two major processes, one local, the other more cosmopolitan. Rapid industrialization of the island's economy from the 1940s through the late 1960s transformed Puerto Rican social and economic structures and led to the large-scale out-migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States. Economic transformation had clearly brought social mobility and a rising standard of living for some, and this outcome was idealized by scholars during the 1950s and 1960s. But a significant swath of the population remained impoverished and either left for the United States in search of economic opportunities or lived in the squalor of urban *arrabales* or slums. The "colonial pact" was revised in 1952 with the founding of the Estado Libre Asociado or Commonwealth, but ultimate power continued to reside in Washington, not San Juan.

The persistence of urban poverty, continued colonial control, and the migration process became focal points for a new generation of scholars who came of age during the early 1970s on the island and in Puerto Rican communities in the United States. Their work reflected research focuses sweeping academic disciplines in universities throughout Europe, the United States, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Social and economic history—the "new history" or history from the bottom up—was in vogue, and the role of the United States as an imperialist power in the twentieth century had been highlighted by the triumph of Fidel Castro's revolution in Cuba in 1959 and U.S. intervention in Vietnam. These factors weighed heavily on younger intellectuals, who delved into historical archives seeking the origins of the ongoing colonial dilemma of twentieth-century Puerto Rico and the underside of "the industrialization miracle." Much research focused on the nineteenth century, but the twentieth century inevitably drew the most interest because the commonwealth concept, industrialization, and migration all needed to be considered critically by a generation of scholars who were not the architects but the products of these processes.

By and large, the new generation of scholars, while highlighting the roles of workers or women or other previously neglected actors of history, came to the same conclusions about early-twentieth-century Puerto Rican history as those in the scholarship of the generation of the 1930s. The major (and sometimes only) source material used to evaluate the island prior to the Great Depression were the very works indicting the sugar companies, the ones produced in reaction to the crisis of the 1930s. Additionally in the 1960s and 1970s, the new interest in social history coincided with a revival of nationalist sentiment in Puerto Rico under the influence of the Cuban Revolution. These trends brought to the fore the images of a rapacious U.S. imperialism, absentee sugar companies, and corrupt political leaders who cooperated in the new colonial or neocolonial order of the early twentieth

https://doi.org/10.1017/S002387910001952X Published online by Cambridge University Press

century on both islands. But again, considerations of the impact of colonial annexation in early-twentieth-century Puerto Rico ignored the preexisting degree of land concentration on the eve of the U.S. invasion. This oversight continued despite the fact that the new generation of historians sought to revise the "nationalist distortions" of an earlier generation, which had focused exclusively on the national question and largely ignored class issues and working-class history.[45] The generation of the 1970s, which sought to distinguish itself from the earlier nationalist historiography, unwittingly embraced many of the conclusions of the generation of 1930.

Two major aspects of Puerto Rican history were neglected. The first was the impact of the Spanish colonial experience on island society in the nineteenth century. In portraying U.S. colonial exploitation, much scholarship did not bother to consider the realities of Spanish colonialism. A myth developed that the United States was somehow responsible for introducing the dynamic of class exploitation to Puerto Rican society, as if Spanish colonialism had been benign. The second and most important neglected aspect of the past consisted of the activities of the Puerto Rican rural population, who had been cast as helpless and hapless victims of the efficient imperialist machine sweeping through the island, devouring land and other resources.

Our article has shown that landownership was significantly more concentrated at the close of the Spanish colonial period than in 1910. More Puerto Rican rural households owned the land that they were cultivating in 1910 than in 1899, despite the well-known activities of absentee sugar corporations. Landlessness declined between 1899 and 1910, and land became more equitably distributed by 1915 than prior to the U.S. invasion in some municipal districts.

Puerto Rican rural households took advantage of a dynamically ex-

45. See the discussion in Gervasio L. García, *Historia crítica, historia sin coartadas: Algunos problemas de la historia de Puerto Rico* (Río Piedras, P.R.: Huracán, 1985), esp. "Nuevos enfoques, viejos problemas: Reflexión crítica sobre la nueva historia," 44–64. Although purportedly taking a new look at the past, García nonetheless repeated the old argument about land tenure and argued that technological modernization accelerated land concentration. The first critique of the "old historiography" was published in 1969 by Manuel Maldonado Denis as *Puerto Rico: A Socio-Historic Interpretation*. The works of Angel Quintero Rivera introduced a complex analysis of class structure and politics vis-à-vis the national question highlighting the history of the Puerto Rican working class. See Quintero Rivera, "Socialist and Cigarmaker: The Artisans' Proletarianization in the Making of the Puerto Rican Working Class," *Latin American Perspective* 10, nos. 2–3 (1983):19–38. See also Gervasio García and Angel Quintero Rivera, *Desafío y solidaridad: Breve historia del movimiento obrero puertorriqueño* (Río Piedras: Huracán, 1982); Angel Quintero Rivera, "Economía y política en Puerto Rico, 1900–1934: Algunos elementos regionales estructurales del crecimiento azucarero y el análisis de la política obrera," *Revista de Ciencias Sociales* 24, nos. 3–4 (1985):394–454. Francisco Scarano has argued, "El crecimiento desbocado de la industria azucarera entre 1900 y 1930 tendió a centralizar la propiedad agraria, especialmente en los llanos costeros." See Scarano, *Puerto Rico: Cinco siglos de historia* (San Juan: McGraw-Hill, 1993), 589.

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panding economy that offered new market opportunities. They moved to new regions of expansion, to the tobacco- and sugarcane-producing districts, and not simply as proletarians to work on modern sugar plantations and in mills. They moved to find land where they could grow tobacco and cane to be marketed to mills owned by Puerto Ricans and by Spaniards as well as by the expanding U.S. sugar interests. Puerto Rican entrepreneurs paradoxically retained a greater share of sugar production than their Cuban or Dominican counterparts, making Puerto Rico the region in the Hispanic Caribbean with greatest local control over the sugar economy.[46] Farm households responded to increased market opportunities for export production in the context of Puerto Rico's integration into U.S. tariff structures.

We do not want to exaggerate the degree of economic opportunity existing in rural Puerto Rico during the early twentieth century. Nor do we want to ignore the exploitation, inequitable distribution of wealth, and poverty hindering the many rural Puerto Rican households who did not own land and even many who did. We also are well aware of the extraordinary disadvantages faced by capital-poor farmers who depended on virtual monopsonies to buy their cane or tobacco and on monopolies for acquiring credit. The extant colonial political structure is not at issue here. But the sweeping generalizations of the literature of the 1930s and the 1970s have not shown how Puerto Rican rural households responded to the new economic order that developed after 1898. The political reactions of early-twentieth-century elite sectors of Puerto Rican society may have been to condemn and denounce the new colonial political structures, but their opinions may or may not have had meaning for farmers and rural workers struggling to make a living, feed their families, and build a future for their children and grandchildren.

Puerto Rican society was highly stratified and polarized in complex ways at the end of the Spanish colonial period. The impact of the transition to a new colonial order was highly uneven among strata and economic sectors. The implicit scheme underlying most of the published literature has

46. U.S. sugar companies produced 37 percent of Cuba's sugar output on the eve of World War I. By 1920 the share produced by U.S. companies had increased to 48 percent as a result of intense mill construction during the war, and by 1925 to 63 percent of Cuban sugar production, as a result of foreclosures due to the crisis in sugar prices. In colonial Puerto Rico in 1910, locally owned mills produced 60 percent of the output, U.S.-owned mills 40 percent. In the mid-1920s, the "Big Four" U.S. sugar corporations produced 42 percent of the output, the remaining 58 percent being produced by locally owned sugar mills. On Cuba, see César Ayala, "Social and Economic Aspects of Sugar Production in Cuba, 1880–1930," *LARR* 30, no. 1 (1995):95–124. Puerto Rico figures for 1910 were calculated from "Government of Porto Rico, Treasury Department, Bureau of Property Taxes: Comparative Statistical Report of Sugar Manufactured in Porto Rico from the Crops of 1907, 1908, 1909, and 1910," U.S. National Archives, Record Group 350, File 422, Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs. Figures on Puerto Rico for the mid-1920s were taken from Gayer et al., *The Sugar Economy*. In the Dominican Republic, about three-quarters of the output of the sugar industry was controlled by two U.S. corporations. See Ayala, *American Sugar Kingdom*, 230.

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assumed the steady disappearance of small and medium-sized proper owners and a process of proletarianization after 1898. The dominant par digm has featured absentee monopolistic capital at one extreme and pr gressively dispossessed Puerto Rican farmers and laborers at the other. B the complex stratification of the sugar and tobacco industries has gotte lost, and the history and possible expansion of a layer of small produce oriented toward new expanding markets for cane and tobacco have bee ruled out or excluded. The increase shown here in the number of sma farms in the early twentieth century suggests the need to study this ove looked sector of society. It may also hold some clues to the relative stabili of the colonial regime in Puerto Rico.

Several fundamental questions should be posed when evaluatir rural Puerto Rican history in the early twentieth century. Were social an economic conditions worse or better for rural Puerto Ricans prior to th crisis of the 1930s than those existing throughout the nineteenth century What kinds of social and economic improvements or disadvantages wer faced by farming families in the early twentieth century? How did the soci economic conditions of rural Puerto Rican families compare with cond tions found in other Latin American and Caribbean societies? Lamentabl we do not have the answers. The state of knowledge of the lives of rur Puerto Ricans from their vantage points in the early twentieth century largely unknown, despite the seemingly definitive conclusions reached b two prior generations of scholars. This is also true of the rural history of th island's neighbors, making comparative observations extraordinarily diff cult. The data introduced in this article suggest that contrary to the imag found in much of the literature, important opportunities and improvement may have arisen in the lives of rural Puerto Ricans in the early twentiet century. The data also suggest more complex and contradictory processe than the prevailing interpretations have allowed. We will not know any c these conclusions for certain until future research is carried out that relie on extensive primary source materials rather than on secondary literature We suspect that the results may be filled with unanticipated surprises.

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