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Alfredo Lopez. *Dona Licha's Island: Modern Colonialism in Puerto Rico*. Boston, Mass.: South End Press, 1987. viii + 178 pp. \$16.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-89608-257-1; \$30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-89608-258-8.

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Destruction or Freedom, the Outcome of Colonialism

The assessment of the impact of colonialism on Puerto Rico is an intriguing subject that continues not only to ignite passion but also to stimulate investigation.[1] *Dona Licha's Island: Modern Colonialism in Puerto Rico* by Alfredo Lopez is one of a number of recent publications on the topic.[2] The book very briefly recounts the impact of the U.S. presence in Puerto Rican politics, economics, culture, and life during the six decades from 1898 through the 1970s. Written in an easy-to-read, journalistic style, the author frequently shows his warm feelings and sympathy for the island and its people, including the 40 percent of *puertoriquenos* who live on the U.S. mainland. The arguments he makes about colonialism and its legacy are often valid, sometimes vivid, as is some of his brief coverage of historic and political events.

The premise of the work is that colonialism, thrust upon Puerto Rico first by Spain for four hundred years and later by the United States, is responsible for shaping a totally dependent economy. Lopez maintains that colonialism perverts and eventually destroys the very fabric of a culture. More important, colonialism controls and warps people's self-image and the way in which they look at the world and even "perverts how they act" (p. 7). There is an added dimension to the nature of colonialism. The longer it remains in a place, the more ingrained and widespread its deleterious effects. This crescendo of negative consequences leads the colony, in this case, Puerto Rico, into a downward-spiral toward disaster—the only alternative to destruction is for the island to become independent. Unfortunately, the book falls short of con-

vincing an impartial reader that the choice of freedom, vis-a-vis independence, or destruction is the only clear alternative for the island.

At the time of the Spanish encounter, the island was inhabited by Tainos, whose numbers were considerably and quickly reduced by a combination of brutal treatment at the hands of the conquerors and the diseases that the Europeans brought to which the natives had no resistance. Along with the conquerors came those whose intent was to either engage in trade or commerce or to find some suitable way to make a living. African slaves were brought in to replace the natives as a work force, and from these developments, the author states, "came the classes, culture and economy which shaped the Puerto Rican nationality" (p. 6).

In 1898 the United States engaged in the Spanish-American War, which lasted a brief 115 days, "though only seventeen of them were spent in Puerto Rico" (p. 22). Puerto Rico was ceded to the United States by the Treaty of Paris, and as Lopez says, "U.S. colonialism came to Puerto Rico" (p. 20). From that time on, the island was run for the benefit of American interests. The Americans came to control the island's production of sugar and coffee, greatly expanding both crops and profoundly altering the Puerto Rican society: slaves, *campesinos*, and landed proletariat disappeared; labor unions grew and became combative (p.34). Life in Puerto Rico was dominated by an economy based on agricultural exports and characterized by extended families, living on small plots

of land as their ancestors had for centuries (p. 55).

Once again, beginning in 1946, Puerto Rican society was radically altered by the forces of colonialism. Operation Bootstrap, a plan for the economic development of Puerto Rico, was based on attracting U.S. capital and was intended to provide a model for the Americas. The program resulted in the dramatic transformation of the Puerto Rican economy from an agrarian to an industrial economy. But, in the process, Puerto Rico became even more dependent on the United States. According to Lopez, Operation Bootstrap was undertaken to protect and ensure the success of colonialism. What followed was a series of attempts to cover up the failures of the operation, whose consequences continue to this day. The theme of the program's failures, together with discussions of some of its consequences, such as mass migrations of Puerto Ricans to the American mainland and the subsequent dislocation of society, constantly reappears throughout the book.

The history of Puerto Rico, Lopez states, has been constantly intertwined with and perverted by colonialism. His points are well taken. There are, however, very serious flaws with the examples he uses in support of his arguments. As unappealing as colonialism is to these reviewers, and as much as one might rally against it from the sidelines, the examples the author uses throughout the book can easily be attributed to the global impact of runaway technologies, which no political system seems able to control, and not necessarily to an exclusively Puerto Rican phenomenon brought about by colonialism. Slums born of industrialization are present on every continent as is the transformation of breathtakingly beautiful beaches, landscapes, and tropical forests into veritable wastelands. To ignore the global context of these currents is to address only one part of a very complex problem.

Equally misleading are the author's discussions of the early political struggles and of the personalities of the early leaders. Such focus is a technique that has been masterfully used by the Uruguayan author Eduardo Galeano in his numerous writings.^[3] In *Dona Licha's Island*, however, the most interesting vignettes about these fascinating times are lost in the confusion of not knowing precisely how the individuals fit into the central theme of the chapter or section. A case in point is that of Luisa Capetillo, one of the Free Federation of Labor's most competent members, whose genius for organizing gained her the distinction of being entrusted with the most difficult assignments. Since she was so often in the front

lines, she was, according to the old labor leaders of the island, the first Puerto Rican woman to wear men's pants in public. Unfortunately, Lopez quickly abandons the subject of the role of women labor leaders for that of prominent labor theater groups. The analysis of the role of the little *bodegas* and social clubs in New York or the appalling profit made by the petrochemical and pharmaceutical companies on the island are equally interesting and equally superficially treated. Quotes from personal interviews give enlightening details but suffer from being over-long and improperly introduced.

Discussions of the major leaders are often contradictory. Luis Munoz Marin was the founder of the Popular Democratic Party of Puerto Rico, which governed the island from the early 1940s to 1968, when the party's candidate lost to a pro-state candidate. He is, as the author tells us, the father of modern Puerto Rico. Munoz Marin oversaw the two decades of the tumultuous changes in Puerto Rican history spurred on by Operation Bootstrap, "changes which transformed the island's stagnant one crop economy into a fully industrial one, urbanized its culture and divided the nation, perhaps irreversibly, by displacing hundreds of thousands of its people" (p. 30). In the same breath, however, the author makes the following disconcerting statement: "But the truth is that, rather than being the work of Munoz Marin, as popular consensus would have it, these developments were the products of a convergence of changes in Puerto Rico's economy and U.S. expansionism, a convergence dramatized by Munoz Marin's political career" (p. 30). Other leaders such as Ramon Emeterio Betances, the great separatist leader, suffer the same sort of treatment.

One of the book's most disturbing flaw's concerns its own history. As far as these reviewers can reconstruct, the book was originally written in the early 1970s. Indeed, in the "Foreword" the author suggests the book was originally published in 1973 and updated in 1987, though it is also implied that that may have been a different book.^[4] The publisher gives 1987 as the copyright date, with the information provided by the Library of Congress on the verso of the title page indicating that the work is a reprint, issued in 1994. Since none of the sources cited in the footnotes is later than 1984, it is difficult to accept the author's explanation that "the Puerto Rican situation, whether in the United States or in Puerto Rico, basically remains the same," or the assurance that "[w]hen updating was needed, I did it." (p. vii).

These statements create greater anxiety in the face of a number of serious defects. Lopez' sources are dated; as

stated, no work appearing after 1984 is cited. The absence of an index is an inconvenience, and there is no bibliography. The serious lack of organization and poor copy-editing have resulted in a number of mechanical problems. A lengthy passage of several paragraphs dealing with the militarization of the island is repeated verbatim on pages 64-65 and 124-125. Consistency is a problem. In the "Introduction," Lopez states that he does not give footnotes for quotes from private conversations he has had and personal interviews he has conducted (p. viii). Yet he does cite some interviews and conversations (e.g., Chapter 5, footnotes 35 and 37), while not mentioning others. It is disconcerting, to say the least, to encounter lengthy quotations in a reading where the interviewee is identified only by name (e.g., Don Benigno, pp. 26-27, or Oscar Ocasio, pp. 31-33) and where no time frame is given.

The footnotes also provide a good example of the lack of attention to detail that appears throughout this work. There are misspellings (as "Hisotrica" in Chapter 2, footnote 14 or "Cam,pos" in Chapter 3, footnote 19) and gross inattention to details (e.g., Chapter 6, footnote 11, has only the number, with no bibliographic information, and Chapter 3, footnote 9, includes the notation "[Need article name and author].") Finally the citations are incomplete, and many lack page numbers, which would make it difficult for the reader to obtain further information

These reviewers pondered for a long time on the merits of the book's usefulness to students. Though the subject covered in *Dona Licha's Island* is important and timely, the book is too general for experts and has too many flaws to be handed to a beginning student. I would not recommend it to my students. Even the author's hopes "of people reading it in a couple of nights, getting interested and going on to more scholarly, specific, or definite material" (p. viii) are frustrated by a lack of bibliography and index, by incomplete footnotes, and by the very poor copy-editing.

Notes

[1] This subject sorely needs an English work to replace Manuel Maldonado-Denis' excellent *Puerto Rico: A Socio-Historic Interpretation*, trans. Elena Vialo. (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), which is now more than two decades old and out of print. The Spanish version, *Puerto Rico: una interpretacion historico-social*. (Mexico: Siglo Vientiuno Editores, 1988), which is in its twelfth edition, is inaccessible to those who read only English. Perhaps the leading contender for Maldonado-Denis' re-

placement is *The Disenchanted Island: Puerto Rico and the United States in the Twentieth Century* by Ronald Fernandez, 2d ed. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1996; ISBN 0-275-95227-4, \$19.95), which has received excellent reviews.

[2] The following works deal with various aspects of the topic undertaken by Alfredo Lopez: Sherrie L. Bayer, *The Political Economy of Colonialism: The State and Industrialization in Puerto Rico* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1993); ISBN 0-275-94503-0, \$52.95); James L. Dietz, *Economic History of Puerto Rico* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1987), ISBN 0-691-02248-8, \$18.95); Ronald Fernandez, *Prisoners of Colonialism: The Struggle for Justice in Puerto Rico* (Monroe: Common Courage Press, 1994), ISBN 1-567-51028-0, \$14.95); Ronald Fernandez, *Cruising the Caribbean: U.S. Influence & Intervention in the Twentieth Century* (Monroe: Common Courage Press, 1994), ISBN 1-567-51036-1, \$16.95); Edwin Melendez, ed., *Colonial Dilemma: Critical Perspectives on Contemporary Puerto Rico* (Boston, Mass.: South End Press, 1992), ISBN 0-896-08441-8, \$16.00); Amalia Alsina Orozco, *Los congresos pro-independencia* (San Juan, PR: A. Alsina Orozco, 1994); *Del nacionalismo al populismo: cultura y politica in Puerto Rico*. (Rio Piedras, PR: Ediciones Huracan, 1993); and Luis Angel Ferrao, *Pedro Arbizu Campos y el nacionalismo puertorriqueno* (San Juan, PR: Editorial Cultural, 1990).

[3] Among Eduardo H. Galeano's many works are the following: *Memory of Fire: Genesis*, vol. 1 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), ISBN 0-394-74730-5, \$16.00); *Memory of Fire: Faces and Masks*, vol. 2 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), ISBN 0-394-75167-1, \$15.00); *Memory of Fire: Century of the Wind*, vol. 3 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), ISBN 0-394-75726-2, \$16.00); *We Say No: Chronicles, 1963-1991* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1992), ISBN 0-393-30898-7, \$11.95); *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), ISBN 0-853-45279-2); and *The Book of Embraces* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), ISBN 0-393-30855-3; \$11.95).

[4] Lopez did publish *The Puerto Rican Papers: Notes on the Re-Emergence of a Nation* (Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill) in 1973.

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