



Rethinking the struggle for Puerto Rican rights

by Lorrin Thomas and Aldo A. Lauria-Santiago, New York, Routledge, 2019, viii+226 pp., \$41.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-138-05530-8

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becoming Korean citizens are legally blocked. The form and content of cosmopolitanism “is yet to come, something awaiting realization” (113), depending on Peruvian migrants’ strategies of action. Legally excluded and physically isolated, Peruvian migrants kept interacting with other cosmopolitan converts and acquired new cosmopolitan language from them for their own cosmopolitan conversions.

This book is original in that it proposes a frame of conversion that combines religious conversion with Bourdieu’s capital conversion and applies it to an empirical study of transnational migration. At the cost of removing the concept of habitus and field from Bourdieu’s capital conversion, however, this book makes social actors “liminars” with tremendous agency to negotiate with social structures. Nevertheless, it deserves praise for vividly portraying the experiences of Peruvian migrants in Korea, which have not been explored so far, through thick description.

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Rethinking the struggle for Puerto Rican rights, by Lorrin Thomas and Aldo A. Lauria-Santiago, New York, Routledge, 2019, viii+226 pp., \$41.95 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-138-05530-8

Two noted historians of the Puerto Rican diaspora have joined forces to produce a valuable, thoughtful, well-documented, and well-written synthesis of Puerto Rican social and political activism in the United States, mostly in New York City during the second half of the twentieth century. Lorrin Thomas and Aldo Lauria-Santiago dwell on social movements led by Puerto Rican migrants and their descendants to secure their basic rights to work, housing, education, and political representation. Aside from New York, the book covers other large metropolitan areas – especially Chicago and Philadelphia – where many Puerto Ricans settled after World War II, as well as smaller cities like Hartford, Connecticut, and Camden, New Jersey, where they increased their electoral clout beginning in the 1970s.

The authors acknowledge that Puerto Rican claims for rights were rooted in an earlier period (the 1920s), when Puerto Ricans started to move en masse to New York City. Despite being U.S. citizens since 1917, stateside Puerto Ricans were ‘often treated as *alien*, both unassimilable and dangerous,’ and therefore comparable to ‘many foreign and impoverished newcomers’ (p. 2). Following the general objectives of the collection ‘American Social and Political Movements of the Twentieth Century,’ Thomas and Lauria-Santiago appraise the origins,

goals, leaders, ideas, achievements, and shortcomings of various Puerto Rican grassroots movements, particularly since the 1960s. They provide a generally positive assessment of Puerto Ricans' collective advances, especially in politics and education, less so in the labour and housing markets.

Although *Rethinking the Struggle for Puerto Rican Rights* does not explicitly espouse a theoretical framework to social and political movements, it does propose three broad conceptual points. To begin, the Puerto Rican struggle has not been a monolithic undertaking centred on a dominant ideology or political strategy, but rather an assemblage of heterogeneous groups ranging from liberal to radical – including labour unions, community organizations, political parties, and even underground groups advocating armed struggle. Second, many of the community's claims for rights have revolved around bread-and-butter issues like job discrimination, unequal access to housing and education, and police abuse. Third, the radical politics of the 1960s and 1970s – spearheaded by the African-American civil rights movement – helped make the plight of the Puerto Rican community more visible but did not mobilize most of its members. By and large, Puerto Ricans have not favoured violent confrontation but rather adaptation and accommodation to existing institutions in the United States as well as on the Island.

Thomas and Lauria-Santiago deftly combine a wide array of primary and secondary sources, including the historical archives of the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños at Hunter College in New York; journalistic articles published in *The New York Times*, *El Diario*, and other U.S. periodicals; and the scholarship of several generations of Puerto Rican historians and social scientists. The book is grounded in solid archival research, including the authors' own work in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. Hence, the book showcases the 'pioneering contributions to understanding a variety of issues specific to Puerto Ricans' (p. 187), including colonial migration, bilingual education, industrial restructuring, and gentrification.

One of the authors' key findings is that stateside Puerto Ricans have historically shared many challenges with African Americans, especially in New York City, and developed strategic alliances with them. Puerto Rican organizations intersected in myriad ways with those of African Americans, most notably during the 1960s and 1970s. For example, the Black Panther Party inspired the short-lived but influential Young Lords, founded in Chicago by José 'Cha Cha' Jiménez in 1968 (pp. 109–14). During the era of 'mass mobilization' (1965–73), the Young Lords were one of the most prominent Puerto Rican organizations, though not the most representative. Similarly, police brutality has long been an intractable problem in poor African-American and Puerto Rican neighbourhoods, and Puerto Rican youth often became radicalized by their traumatic experiences with the police, much like their African-American peers (p. 102). To this day, Puerto Ricans in the United States are usually stigmatized as a 'non-white' minority, along with African Americans and Mexican Americans, who have often served as models for Puerto Rican community organization and empowerment.

Another recurring theme in Thomas and Lauria-Santiago's narrative is the gradual 'shift away from a nationalist form of ethnic politics and toward a deeper engagement with policy issues and cultural politics that were more broadly Latino rather than specifically Puerto Rican, including language rights,

higher education access, school quality, affordable housing, and fair policing' (p. 196). Nonetheless, many stateside Puerto Rican activists remain critical of U.S. colonialism in Puerto Rico and support the Island's independence, while ordinary citizens may retain a 'transnational' attachment to their homeland. Cultural nationalism continues to be a driving force of the Puerto Rican diaspora.

Thomas and Lauria-Santiago have written a straightforward and illuminating chronicle of the Puerto Rican experience in the United States, highlighting their numerous efforts to resist exclusion, inequality, and marginalization. The authors rightly underscore 'the vibrancy of Puerto Ricans' struggle for civil rights and recognition in the United States' (p. 157). They thereby offer a welcome corrective to the all-too-common caricature of stateside Puerto Ricans as passive victims of colonialism, racism, deindustrialization, and globalization. In Thomas and Lauria-Santiago's alternative narrative, Puerto Rican migrants and their descendants largely emerge as complex agents of their own destinies, albeit constrained by difficult socioeconomic circumstances, such as high poverty and unemployment rates.

The book's sympathetic account documents that many Puerto Ricans have overcome multiple barriers, improved their socioeconomic status, and become better integrated into mainstream U.S. society. Thomas and Lauria-Santiago seem cautiously optimistic regarding the eventual incorporation of Puerto Ricans in the United States, largely through their own efforts. Still, stateside Puerto Ricans lag behind other ethnic groups on many standard socioeconomic indicators, while the Island has recently experienced the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, aggravated by two devastating hurricanes and several earthquakes, which have refuelled mass migration. The future well-being of the burgeoning Puerto Rican diaspora depends substantially on the community's resources, accumulated experiences, and leadership in facing entrenched disadvantages in the United States.

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Reflections on the extreme right in Western Europe, 1990–2008, by Christopher T. Husbands, Abingdon, Routledge, 2020, xxi + 1–286pp., £34.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-1138389427

Chris Husbands was a pioneer of scholarly research into the emergence of a new extreme right in Western Europe during the 1970s. Initially, his main focus was the British National Front, a thinly-disguised neo-fascist party whose signature issue