

Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico

Laura Briggs

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Original and compelling, Laura Briggs's *Reproducing Empire* shows how, for both Puerto Ricans and North Americans, ideologies of sexuality, reproduction, and gender have shaped relations between the island and the mainland. From science to public policy, the "culture of poverty" to overpopulation, feminism to Puerto Rican nationalism, this book uncovers the persistence of concerns about motherhood, prostitution, and family in shaping the beliefs and practices of virtually every player in the twentieth-century drama of Puerto Rican colonialism. In this way, it sheds light on the legacies haunting contemporary debates over globalization.

Puerto Rico is a perfect lens through which to examine colonialism and globalization because for the past century it has been where the United States has expressed and fine-tuned its attitudes toward its own expansionism. Puerto Rico's history holds no simple lessons for present-day debate over globalization but does unearth some of its history. *Reproducing Empire* suggests that interventionist discourses of rescue, family, and sexuality fueled U.S. imperial projects and organized American colonialism.

Through the politics, biology, and medicine of eugenics, prostitution, and birth control, the United States has justified its presence in the territory's politics and society. Briggs makes an innovative contribution to Puerto Rican and U.S. history, effectively arguing that gender has been crucial to the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico, and more broadly, to U.S. expansion elsewhere.

Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico Details

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From Reader Review Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico for online ebook

Kelly says

3.8 Interesting look at how working class Puerto Rican women have been portrayed and controlled in the context of U.S imperialism. The book focuses more heavily on the different narratives surrounding Puerto Rican women as opposed to describing the experiences these women had. The author justifies her choice to do this in her epilogue, but I still found a tad disappointing (but that could be just personal tastes). Some chapters are more interesting than others, and sometimes the author's writing style could appear drawn out and a bit unorganized. Overall, it was a very enlightening read

Joshua says

The concluding essay is amazing.

Bekka says

Really excellent look at exactly what the title says, "Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico". Laura Briggs' examination of these dynamics and the occurrence of forced sterilization in Puerto Rico is a worthwhile read. As a piece of cultural history and theory, I quite enjoyed it. (Hence, an academic read).

Ashley says

Densely written and very reliant on post-structuralist frameworks. The decision to lay out her theoretical underpinnings at the end of the book is an interesting one. It leaves the reader with a lot to think about once they are done. Briggs takes up Spivak's question, "Can the subaltern speak?", with some success. Rather than using subaltern women (in this case Puerto Rican women who suffered at the hands of American colonial efforts) as "ventriloquist puppets" she talks about those who enacted laws that dictated the lives of these women. Tricky choice. We don't get any stories about women as agents of their own lives. The only characters in the book are people like Margaret Sanger. Rather than risk speaking for the subaltern, the subaltern don't speak at all in this book.

The strength of this book, in my opinion, is Briggs discussion of the changing nature of racism. She effectively maps out the transition from biological racism (think Phrenology) to historical racism (think civilization). Nicely done.

John Hansen says

Well-researched, on a significant and vastly underwritten topic, but I couldn't connect stylistically.

Aura says

One of the worst Puerto Rican history books I've ever read. It is not well contextualized in Puerto Rican or Latin American historiographies, which brings a lot of problems to the author's analysis. Does being an American scholar entitle you to completely change the experiences of Puerto Rican women? Sources aren't problematized properly and thus her analysis is relatively weak. If you see this as a good book, you need to read more on Puerto Rico.

Nicole Cordier says

Dense but an excellent analysis. A little heavy on theory in places but where she is heavy on theory, she explains the theory well.
