

A woman with curly hair is shown from the chest up, holding a large green leaf to her face. She has a serious expression. In the background, a raised fist is visible. The image has a high-contrast, almost graphic quality.

PUERTO RICAN
WOMEN ORGANIZING
FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

The Politics of Care Work

Emma
Amador

The Politics
of Care
Work

BUY

The Politics of Care Work

PUERTO RICAN
WOMEN ORGANIZING
FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE
Emma Amador

DUKE

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*For my parents and teachers, Salvador and Deborah.
For my loves, Kyle and Luna.*

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Acknowledgments

When I was twenty years old, I interviewed my grandmother, Formeria Jiménez Amador, using a tape recorder that produced a scratchy recording of her life story. After I asked her about her life, she spent hours telling me about growing up in rural Puerto Rico and her later migration to the United States. She also recounted the difficulties and joys she experienced as a seamstress, domestic worker, and mother. Over two decades later, long after she passed away, I revisited these recordings while completing this book. Listening, I laughed as I heard roosters crowing, a chorus of coquí frogs, and my grandmother's constant side conversations with her beloved dog Bingo. I regretted that when I conducted the interview I had not yet studied much Puerto Rican and Latina history and hadn't asked relevant follow-up questions. However, I was also struck by the beauty of this recording precisely because I didn't know how to ask the "right" research questions. The interview is now a record of my grandmother teaching me about her history, my history, and the broader history of Puerto Ricans. The lessons she taught me about women's history and the importance of care work in Puerto Rican migrant communities have profoundly shaped my work and this book. Thank you, *abuelita*.

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Introduction

Yolanda Sánchez, a social worker and community organizer born in Harlem in 1932, was a child of the Puerto Rican diaspora. Sánchez was part of a community that formed after millions of islanders migrated to the United States following the turn of the twentieth century. She was an activist who dedicated her life to public service and helping her community. As a Puerto Rican, a Black woman, a feminist, and a civil rights leader, she inflected her community organizing with the perspectives and concerns of multiple social movements. Her work was also grounded in day-to-day efforts as a social service provider, educator, and advocate to ensure the civil, political, and economic rights of Puerto Ricans. When she was asked how she wanted to be remembered, she said she hoped “that people will remember me as a person who cared for her community, who cared for people, and who attempted to use her life and her energies to improve conditions.”¹ This book tells the history of the caring labor of Puerto Ricans like Sánchez. It is a story about care work as a space of politics—a story that maps an intergenerational legacy of political activism demanding dignity for Puerto Ricans on the archipelago and in the diaspora.

In the case of Sánchez, her own experiences growing up poor in New York City shaped her later efforts as an activist. Her parents had migrated to the United States from Puerto Rico to make new lives in the city and ran upon difficult times. After her father left the family, her mother applied for public assistance benefits in the South Bronx to support her six children. Sánchez later reflected, “Sometimes I look back and say, ‘My God, the little Puerto Rican girl who started out on welfare, look where she wound up.’”² Soon after she graduated from the City College of New York in 1954, she became a caseworker for the New York City Department of Welfare (figure 1.1). She brought her perspective of having been a welfare recipient to her new job and soon began meeting with other Puerto Rican youth and social workers to discuss how they could use their professional status to develop new ways of helping their communities. These collaborations would result

FIGURE 1.1. Yolanda Sánchez. Photograph by Adál Alberto Maldonado. Source: Louis Reyes Rivera and Julio Rodríguez, eds., *Portraits of the Puerto Rican Experience* (New York: Institute for Puerto Rican Urban Studies–IPRUS, 1984), 78.



in the flourishing of community-organizing approaches in social work and bind together their efforts with grassroots movements for civil rights in New York.

Alongside other Puerto Rican social worker activists of this period, like Antonia Pantoja and Marta Valle, Sánchez helped create foundational Puerto Rican-led social service institutions. The story of this group of activists illuminates how social work evolved into a dynamic space for political action in 1960s New York. They built on the achievements of previous generations of social work activists while also fighting to transform the profession by making it more accountable to the community.³ For example, Sánchez became the first social worker hired by the activist educational organization ASPIRA of New York, which advocated on behalf of Puerto Rican youth and organized for bilingual education.⁴ Institutions like ASPIRA (“aspire,” in Spanish) played crucial roles in addressing the needs of the Puerto Rican community in the United States in the wake of mass displacement and migration. Sánchez’s work brought her into conversation and collaboration with like-minded organizers agitating more broadly for the equal rights and care of Puerto Ricans, African Americans, Latinos/as/xs, and women.

While Sánchez’s activism was rooted in the community in New York City where she was born, it was also connected to her commitment to Puerto

Rico and the ongoing struggle of its people for self-determination. In 1962 when Sánchez was working for ASPIRA, she helped bring groups of Puerto Rican youth in New York City on trips to Puerto Rico. These were her first visits to Puerto Rico, and they further connected her work to communities on the archipelago.⁵ She also became involved in discussions about the political future of Puerto Rico, and this work became increasingly intertwined with her ongoing activism in New York City. Alongside other activists, she argued that Puerto Ricans should have a political voice beyond organizations managed by the Puerto Rican government—in fact, at times she joined criticisms of their work in the United States. Her activism illuminates the interconnections between political organizing in New York City’s Puerto Rican community with that in Puerto Rico as well as the continued political significance of the migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States.

In the years that followed, Sánchez became an increasingly important figure in New York City politics. She held directorship positions in ASPIRA, the Puerto Rican Association for Community Affairs (PRACA), and the East Harlem Council for Human Services.⁶ In each of these roles she helped lead the charge for accountable and community-oriented social and economic programs for Puerto Ricans in New York City. After receiving her master’s degree at Columbia University, she also worked in higher education, and, in her role as a staff member at City College, she helped develop one of the first Puerto Rican studies programs in the United States.⁷ Her work within these organizations was linked to her feminist activism, and she also assisted in the development of both the National Conference of Puerto Rican Women and the National Puerto Rican Women’s Caucus.⁸ In the 1980s, she said, “I think we have a long way to go, not only as Americans, but specifically within the Puerto Rican community, before we really accept women as equals,” and she noted that she wanted her daughter “to feel that she has options that [she herself] didn’t have as a Puerto Rican woman.”⁹ As an institution builder and feminist organizer, Sánchez continued to care for her community.

The political path that Sánchez followed was made possible in large part by her work and training as a social worker. The social work profession created opportunities for Puerto Rican women to professionalize and organize with those who shared their concerns and political goals. In fact, in this book I show how the occupation had already served as a space of vibrant political organizing for over fifty years.¹⁰ This activism was a part of broader struggles for Puerto Rican rights in the wake of US colonialism, displacement, and migration to the United States in the twentieth century. I explore

how social work became one site of this activism, specifically around citizenship rights and care. As Sánchez and her cohort became community organizers, they forged new paths within the profession that connected back to a long intergenerational history of social worker activism in Puerto Rico and the United States. These forms of activism continue to have lasting impacts in Puerto Rican communities today.

This book considers the story of Sánchez alongside other Puerto Ricans as they fought to survive and help their communities in the face of massive political, economic, and social upheavals. I look in particular at the stories of social worker activists alongside the stories of working-class women who became clients of social welfare programs in Puerto Rico and the Puerto Rican diaspora. Many of these working-class women were also care workers, providing reproductive labor in their own homes and working in the homes of others. This includes women like Sánchez's mother, who migrated to the United States and raised six children while receiving welfare benefits. This book considers the everyday resistance of applicants at the welfare office who pushed back against cuts to benefits as they sought to care for their families. It connects such stories to those of migrant domestic workers who organized alongside professional women social workers to demand labor standards to protect care workers. There is a common thread in each of these moments: Puerto Rican women organized around the politics of care.

I explore the history of the politics of care work through an examination of social work and social welfare. This approach reveals how Puerto Ricans were involved in building and navigating social welfare programs and policies in Puerto Rico and the Puerto Rican diaspora and how these efforts were inherently political. Within the creation of social welfare programs, Puerto Ricans negotiated the terms of their US citizenship, which had been imposed in 1917 but remained colonial and second class. Despite these restrictions, Puerto Ricans fought for equal rights as citizens and contested their colonial citizenship. This struggle played out on the archipelago and in the growing Puerto Rican migrant community that formed in the United States over the course of the twentieth century. Through their engagement with social welfare policies, Puerto Ricans also found an important avenue to demand care for their communities. Therefore, the history of social welfare and social work can serve as a fulcrum for rethinking US colonialism and citizenship in Puerto Rico and the Puerto Rican diaspora, with a focus on Puerto Rican activism.

At the heart of this book are stories of women like Sánchez whose lives were defined by relentless efforts to care for their communities. For Sánchez

this meant working tirelessly to build organizations that helped Puerto Ricans on both the archipelago and in the diaspora. Later in life she had a home in Puerto Rico, continued her work as a community organizer, and supported the independence of the archipelago from US colonialism. After she passed away in 2012, the community organizing efforts that she helped develop would continue as numerous other activists followed in her footsteps. Indeed, women care workers, some of whom are social workers, have been at the forefront of recent Puerto Rican struggles for citizenship rights and care. Some of these activists protested contemporary austerity measures and led relief efforts in the wake of natural disasters like Hurricane Maria in 2017 and the social and political uprisings in Puerto Rico in the twenty-first century. Others have been at the forefront of creating new initiatives to address the needs of recently displaced, migrant, and diasporic Puerto Ricans in the United States. This work remains vital as the archipelago grapples with out-migration to the United States. This book aims to provide some historical context for these continued political mobilizations. Each chapter centers on the lives and work of women like Sánchez. The stories of these activists reveal the often-untold centrality of Puerto Rican women to the political history of Puerto Rico and its diaspora.

Puerto Ricans, Citizenship, and Social Welfare

Puerto Rico was colonized by the United States in 1898, and since 1917 its people have held a form of colonial and territorial US citizenship that remains unequal to that in the continental United States. This book considers how, despite these restrictions, the granting of symbolic US citizenship has nonetheless had the effect of opening up a discursive space for Puerto Ricans to make political claims to the rights and benefits of full US citizenship. Throughout the twentieth century, Puerto Ricans on the archipelago continuously lobbied and argued for access to protection, coverage, and rights as US citizens.¹¹ In a parallel and sometimes overlapping struggle to lay claim to US citizenship rights, Puerto Rican migrants in the United States, who are legally entitled to full citizenship rights, have also fought for access to these rights because of racial exclusions they faced in the United States. I consider how demands for full coverage under federal social welfare policy and the social provisions provided by US citizenship became an important arena of political action in Puerto Rican communities. While Puerto Ricans were often unsuccessful in negotiating change to their formal political status, organizing around social welfare policy was sometimes more fruitful. In fact, over the

decades covered in this book, these social welfare programs in Puerto Rico expanded from serving hundreds of people to nearly half the population.¹² Therefore, studying the political mobilization that resulted in changes to social policy can shed new light on the history of Puerto Rican citizenship, US colonialism, and the politics of social welfare.

The history of social welfare policy and programs has long been considered important to understanding citizenship in both the United States and Latin America. Previous studies have shown that the creation of social welfare programs in the twentieth century shaped social inequalities and led to differential access to rights based on gender and race.¹³ However, the development of social welfare programs and social policy in Puerto Rico has remained underexamined in historical scholarship, as have the ways these programs have impacted how Puerto Ricans have experienced US citizenship.¹⁴ Moreover, Puerto Rico has been glaringly absent from histories of US social welfare, despite the central role US colonial administrators played in the territories.¹⁵ The history of social welfare has either been overlooked or cast as a realm of colonial domination in which political agency was largely absent. While this study recognizes social welfare as a place of state control and regulation, it also draws on histories of the state and social welfare that have called for deep investigation of social welfare formation as a space of social struggle over class, race, and gender.¹⁶ This includes critical studies of the history of social welfare in Latin America and the United States, as well as within colonial and imperial projects more broadly.¹⁷ It also builds upon Puerto Rican feminist social scientific scholarship on social welfare policies in Puerto Rico, which has long emphasized the need to recognize social welfare policies as central to Puerto Rican society.¹⁸ This approach allows me to grapple with the history of the Puerto Rican state as a colonial institution that is raced and gendered and that was built, reworked, and contested over the course of the twentieth century by Puerto Rican actors and the political projects they developed.

This book explores the history of social welfare in Puerto Rico by mapping the colonial contours of US social welfare provisions in Puerto Rico. It considers how Puerto Rican officials shaped the colonial state alongside how clients of social welfare programs experienced differences in colonial citizenship as a result of new social welfare policies and benefits. This approach draws on historian Donna Guy's insight that the development of social welfare programs must be considered as a process rather than a product, something that is built and reworked by state officials, administrators, and clients.¹⁹ Guy also notes that the history of welfare is often women's history and that over-

looking women's stories in history has resulted in an analysis of the state that has often erased women and gender from the story of state formation. In this book, I put the history of women and gender fully into the frame of the history of the state. Thus, this is a story about Puerto Ricans and the history of social welfare programs in which these terms are understood to be categories in flux, whose definitions have changed over time and across contexts.

In order to tell the interconnected history of Puerto Rican citizenship and social welfare over the past century, this book draws on archives in both Puerto Rico and the United States. In doing so, it sheds light on the creation of US colonial bureaucracies and the colonial officials who managed them. However, its main focus is on Puerto Ricans who participated in creating or navigating these institutions and their political work. Part of this research included examining the records of the massive bureaucratic archive in the Archivo General de Puerto Rico that resulted from the creation of social welfare programs in the mid-twentieth century.²⁰ These social welfare archives, largely untouched by researchers, document the formation of social welfare programs as well as the work of those who built and managed these programs. These social welfare records also reveal that from the beginning social welfare bureaucracies were concerned with Puerto Rican migration. Additionally, the Puerto Rican state circulated information about migrant clients between its offices on the archipelago and the offices that it created in the continental United States. Therefore, this book also draws on social welfare records located in the collections of the Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora at Hunter College in New York City.²¹

My use of these social welfare records allows me to explore histories of displacement, migration, and mobility over the course of the twentieth century, a period when nearly a third of the population of Puerto Rico migrated to the continental United States.²² The impact of these migrations touched every aspect of Puerto Rican society, both on the archipelago as well as in the growing diasporic community in the United States. Building on historical research focused on migration and transnational communities, this book covers both Puerto Ricans on the archipelago and in the United States.²³ It moves between archipelagic and stateside communities, crossing boundaries that can be seen simultaneously as national and colonial. For the purposes of this study, the emphasis is on an integrated history of Puerto Ricans in both locations.

Over the course of the twentieth century, Puerto Rico remained a colony of the United States. This colonial relationship has afforded its population limited self-government but no voice in the government of the United States.

US officials explained the takeover of Puerto Rico to constituents in the United States and to Puerto Ricans alike by describing the legacy of Spanish rule as chaotic and backward and the local population as racially inferior to that of the United States. Puerto Rico needed, the argument went, the tutelage of the US government before it would be able to exercise its own sovereignty.²⁴

Within the US empire, the construction of Puerto Rican difference was also profoundly shaped by US beliefs about Puerto Ricans' gender and sexuality. As historian Eileen Findlay has shown, US colonists defined Puerto Ricans as hypersexualized, inherently immoral, and often feminized.²⁵ They believed that US colonialism would "civilize" and "modernize" Puerto Rico through a campaign of moral reform that would regulate the wayward sexuality of its people. Therefore, from the start, the paternalistic US colonial project emphasized state-sponsored regulations that centered on the regulation of sexuality, such as reforms that promoted marriage and policed prostitution. Historian Laura Briggs has also emphasized how the US empire in Puerto Rico specifically focused on eugenics through the promotion of birth control and sterilization programs.²⁶ The various types of reform that colonial officials enacted would significantly impact the lives of working-class women, who were the main targets of many of these colonial policies.

Some Puerto Ricans hoped that the territory might eventually become a full part of the United States, while others struggled for independence that would not arrive. In 1900, the United States formalized its colonial relationship with Puerto Rico via the Foraker Act, which determined that the archipelago's residents were "Puerto Rican citizens" and not US citizens. It also outlined that the US government had the right to apply US laws and policies at its own discretion without affording Puerto Ricans voting representation in the US Congress.²⁷ Shortly afterward, the US Supreme Court case *Downes v. Bidwell* excluded Puerto Ricans from US citizenship, making Puerto Rico a "non-incorporated territory," which meant it would remain a possession without being annexed. This distinction marked the archipelago as "foreign in a domestic sense," a territory of the United States, under the legislative oversight of Congress.²⁸

Change came in 1917 when Congress made Puerto Ricans "United States citizens" with the signing of the Jones-Shafroth Act. However, Puerto Rico's status as a non-incorporated territory still restricted this version of US citizenship. Puerto Ricans remained without voting representation in the US Congress or entitlement to the rights mandated to US citizens living in the United States. Despite these restrictions on Puerto Rican citizenship, some

heralded its imposition as a decisive step toward permanent incorporation and full citizenship rights. However, the territorial differences inherent to Puerto Ricans' US citizenship were further inscribed in 1922 with the US Supreme Court case *Balzac v. People of Porto Rico*. In its ruling, the Court officially determined that the US Constitution did not cover Puerto Rico and that, in turn, the Bill of Rights did not apply to the people of Puerto Rico.²⁹ Puerto Ricans were citizens in name but this citizenship lacked political substance. This ruling was a blow to Puerto Ricans who hoped that the archipelago was going to eventually be incorporated into the United States as well as to those who sought independence.

While the US citizenship that Puerto Ricans held after 1917 remained second class, the creation of social welfare programs during and after World War I would provoke discussion about extending social benefits to Puerto Rico. In fact, this book shows that from the very first moments when social reformers and activists in the United States worked to create social welfare legislation and programs that would develop new rights and benefits for US citizens, Puerto Ricans were actively lobbying for Puerto Rico and other territories to be included under these provisions. While the inclusion of Puerto Rico under the titles of federally mandated child and maternal health programs mainly only had symbolic effect (because only a small population were the beneficiaries of these programs), the inclusion began to set a new precedent that the archipelago could be covered under social policy. This suggested to Puerto Rican reformers and US colonial administrators on the archipelago that, while formal citizenship rights remained elusive, they could successfully advocate for benefits for Puerto Ricans.

This political organizing would only gain steam when the Great Depression of 1929 hit Puerto Rico with ferocity. While the archipelago's political status remained unchanged, the decade was nonetheless marked by increasing political mobilization. When social reforms in the United States were passed to alleviate the ongoing impact of the Depression, Puerto Ricans also called for parallel relief to help workers and their families. Eventually, Puerto Rico was partially included under federal social programs created during the New Deal. Most notably, this included the development in 1933 of the Puerto Rico Emergency Relief Administration (PRERA) and in 1935 of the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration (PRRA).³⁰ Within a year of the creation of PRERA, over 33 percent of the Puerto Rican population was relying on some form of assistance from the organization. This marked a massive change in the relationship between the colonial state and the Puerto Rican population; suddenly relief administrators and social workers were in the

position of forging new forms of governance. The expansion of social programs, paired with a developmentalist discourse, resulted in growing support for continued economic and social reform.

During the 1930s, Puerto Ricans also fought for coverage under the newly created titles of the US Social Security Act of 1935, which initially did not include provisions for Puerto Rico. The passage of the Social Security Act created sweeping new forms of social provisions in the United States, including old age assistance, unemployment insurance, and social welfare programs for the poor, women, and children. In the US context, its passage transformed the nature of US citizenship by allocating benefits according to new gendered and raced divisions. In particular, it defined only certain groups as “workers” and some as “dependents”—while leaving others unprotected. As historian Linda Gordon has shown, the outcome of these policies was that certain programs of social provision (particularly those for single mothers) were defined as “welfare,” a term that became stigmatized and set them apart from other benefits for retired or elderly workers.³¹ This book shows how in Puerto Rico the fight for coverage under Social Security reflected the colonial history of this policy and decades of struggle by Puerto Ricans to seek equal coverage under its provisions.³² Over these decades, Puerto Ricans were able to secure partial and provisional coverage under these policies, though their administration in the territories remained at the discretion of the US Congress. And while this coverage was limited, it nevertheless did reshape Puerto Ricans’ colonial citizenship by providing access to some federal social welfare benefits and by binding together social welfare agencies in Puerto Rico and the United States.

The impacts of the New Deal in Puerto Rico would also result in new debates over Puerto Rico’s political status and the rise of a new political party, the Partido Popular Democrático (Popular Democratic Party; PPD). PPD leaders worked with liberal US reformers and New Deal policymakers and promised a populist transformation in Puerto Rico through economic and social reform.³³ Its leader, Luis Muñoz Marín, had lived in both Puerto Rico and the United States and had previously supported the archipelago’s independence. After 1938 the party he led would denounce the need for political independence and promote a continued but reformed union between the United States and Puerto Rico. When Muñoz Marín became leader of the Puerto Rican Senate in 1940, this paved the way for a consolidation of the PPD agenda. The PPD’s populist and reformist political platform was closely tied to discussions of social justice that included the promise of social services. During the 1940s this led to the creation of new social welfare

organizations, including the first island-wide Department of Public Welfare in 1943.³⁴ While often severely limited by a lack of funds, these new social programs and policies led to growing expectations among the Puerto Rican population that the state should be attentive to its citizens. In 1948, when the US Congress allowed Puerto Ricans to elect their own governor, the population chose Muñoz Marín, and a formal reworking of Puerto Rico's status began.

The economic and political changes under PPD leadership culminated in the 1952 creation of the Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico (ELA), or the Free Associated State of Puerto Rico. Effectively, the development of the ELA defined Puerto Rico as a "commonwealth," whose change in status was meant to appease concerns about the continuation of the archipelago's colonial status during a period when the decolonization of European colonial possessions was demanded globally. Some heralded this change as a "peaceful revolution" that illustrated the superiority of Puerto Rican and US handling of decolonization.³⁵ Opponents, however, argued that as an *estado libre asociado* the archipelago legally remained a colony of the United States because of the continuation of US congressional oversight, lack of coverage under the US Constitution or Bill of Rights, and, therefore, the limited and contingent variant of territorial citizenship held by Puerto Ricans.³⁶ Puerto Ricans across the political spectrum (among them supporters of statehood, continued affiliation, or independence) remained frustrated by the lack of full representation and citizenship provided to the ELA. However, this book reveals how this moment of stagnation in the political status of Puerto Rico was also a moment of change, as debates about decolonization led to demands for more extensive coverage under federal social policy. Subsequently, amendments to the US Social Security Act were passed that provided more coverage to Puerto Rico and federal assistance to growing numbers of its people. Concurrently, as debates over social policy continued, they became intertwined with concerns about Puerto Rican migration and the growing diasporic community in the United States. These changes further provided populist social welfare programs in Puerto Rico with increased, albeit still second-class, federal funding. Thus, while the terms of colonial governance were renegotiated, the underlying system was maintained.

During the same period, a growing diaspora of Puerto Rican migrants in the United States formed due to colonialism on the archipelago, US labor recruitment, and state-sponsored labor migration.³⁷ One of the particularities of US colonial and territorial citizenship was that, while it had not afforded Puerto Ricans on the archipelago equal citizenship to those in the United States, it did allow Puerto Ricans to migrate to the United States without

being subject to immigration restrictions. Moreover, when Puerto Ricans migrated to the United States, they formally had access to full citizenship rights while living in the United States. However, when Puerto Ricans arrived in the United States, they discovered that these rights were often curtailed locally by systems of racist and xenophobic discrimination.³⁸ Despite this, Puerto Rican migrants did gain access to a broader range of citizenship rights, which created an inequality in the value of Puerto Rican citizenship based on location. When living in the United States, Puerto Ricans legally had voting representation in the US Congress and access to the rights and services allocated to all US citizens. Over time, the Puerto Rican migrant population, mobilizing the fuller citizenship rights available to them in the United States, would begin attempting to exert influence on US politics in ways unavailable to them on the archipelago.³⁹

After the 1940s, migration from Puerto Rico to the United States would also transform dialogues about Puerto Ricans, social welfare, and citizenship rights. During this period, the Puerto Rican government directed a program of state-sponsored labor migration to the United States, catalyzing mass migration and the formation of Puerto Rican communities in the United States.⁴⁰ The combined results of these programs and subsequent migrations over the next fifty years resulted in nearly half of Puerto Rico's population relocating to the United States. Through these changes, Puerto Rico became a community with a population that increasingly circulated between the archipelago and the United States. The Puerto Rican government also expanded its work in the United States by creating a Migration Division of the Puerto Rican Department of Labor to sponsor and direct Puerto Rican labor migration.⁴¹ Over time, representatives of this agency also came to work on behalf of Puerto Rican migrants who faced racist exclusions from exercising their US citizenship. This book shows how the Migration Division also addressed the social service needs of migrants and how over time it wove together social welfare programs in Puerto Rico with those in the United States.

Puerto Ricans in the United States also developed their own struggles to extend social welfare provisions to provide coverage and care for their communities. Activists and grassroots organizations increasingly contested the racial and ethnic discrimination Puerto Ricans faced as well as their limited citizenship. I show how Puerto Ricans who joined the US civil rights movement at this time found new ways to demand equal rights, including coverage under social welfare policies. Their political organizing included mobilization for access to social services, health care, and education. Some activists were critical of the role of the Puerto Rican government in sponsoring migration,

and they worked to create Puerto Rican-led social service organizations in the United States that were not government affiliated. This book shows how, as the Puerto Rican community continued to migrate back and forth between the archipelago and the United States, these movements bound together in organizing for Puerto Rican rights. It concludes by considering the enduring legacy of struggles over social welfare in both Puerto Rico and its diaspora.

Throughout each of these moments in the history of social welfare, this book traces how, even though the US citizenship of Puerto Ricans was severely restricted, Puerto Ricans nevertheless mobilized around this citizenship to demand better coverage under US social policy. While at first US social welfare programs only provided services to small groups of Puerto Ricans, this would change with the partial extension of New Deal programs and the Social Security Act to Puerto Rico. These changes would result in increasingly larger groups of Puerto Ricans being eligible for social welfare provisions from both the Puerto Rican and US governments over the twentieth century. At the same time, the growing population of Puerto Rican migrants in the United States would campaign for equality under social welfare policy. In this book I consider how these two interconnected struggles reveal a long history of Puerto Rican political organizing around the terms and meaning of Puerto Rican citizenship since US colonization.

The Politics of Care Work in Puerto Rican Communities

The stories of social worker activists like Yolanda Sánchez reveal how Puerto Rican women took on the expansion of social welfare benefits as a key political struggle. By focusing on the lives and work of both social workers and working-class women (some of whom were on welfare), I also show how for many women caring labor and political work were entangled. Furthermore, I argue that centering social welfare in labor history can offer a productive vantage point from which to investigate the history of women's work and the production of gendered divisions of labor in both professional and working-class groups. This history reveals how the creation of social policy and the development of social welfare programs have been influenced in powerful ways by the organizing and activism of generations of women whose own gendered labor has been largely missing from the historical record.

The political history of care and social welfare policies in this book builds on labor history scholarship about Puerto Rico, the United States, and Latin

America that has examined the history of women and gender. In particular, it draws on the rich tradition of labor histories written by scholars of Puerto Rico and the Puerto Rican diaspora who have investigated the history of US colonialism, labor, and migration with a focus on gender and race.⁴² This work also has suggested the importance of reproductive and caring labor in these communities, which I investigate further in this book. In doing so, my research is also in dialogue with scholarship on care labor, domestic work, and the history of social welfare in both the United States and Latin America.⁴³ This study is also in conversation with the vibrant and growing field of feminist scholarship on care work, caregiving, and the politics of social reproduction.⁴⁴ The growing literature on the history of care work in both regions has focused on the intersection of race and gender as well as on the significance of migration, immigration, and the formation of transnational communities. This book contributes a history of Puerto Rican caring labor in the twentieth century—as it took various forms across the archipelago and diaspora—to this dialogue.

This book examines the history of Puerto Rican women's care work and social reproduction by building, in particular, on scholarship that has documented how care work has been shaped by systems of exploitation under capitalism and colonialism. As Evelyn Nakano Glenn has shown, the “social organization of care” in US society and under US empire has relied on coercion that has often “forced” women into positions as care workers, especially those that are immigrants, migrants, or racial minorities.⁴⁵ Glenn emphasizes how the power relationships produced under capitalism and colonialism create labor systems that result in “racialized gendered servitude.” Historical scholarship on care workers who were paid domestic workers and household workers has demonstrated how there has been a long and painful legacy of these workers being excluded from labor protections and exploited. As Eileen Boris and Jennifer Klein have shown, transformations in US social policy have also served to push poor and immigrant women into positions as care workers who are sometimes paid by the state.⁴⁶ Like Boris and Klein, I aim to “rethink the history of the American welfare state from the perspective of care work” through telling a story that also centers on the history of these policies in Puerto Rico.⁴⁷

This book also builds on Premilla Nadasen's insight that discourses about “care work” in recent years have often obscured the power hierarchies and forms of exploitation that take shape in the organization of reproductive labor.⁴⁸ For Nadasen, using the term *social reproduction* can more fully capture these power relationships by building on Marxist feminist and Black/

feminist of color scholarship, both of which have long traditions of critically examining social reproduction within the history of capitalism. In this book, I use the terms *care work*, *reproductive labor*, and *social reproduction*, and my study aims to think critically about these forms of labor and the politics of defining their meaning and value in different moments in Puerto Rican history. I locate my investigation of care work and reproductive labor within broader histories of what Eileen Boris calls the “racialized and gendered state,” and particularly consider the creation of social welfare policies as locations of struggle over these forms of labor.⁴⁹ In this project, my analysis of care work considers a variety of forms of reproductive labor and also explores forms of collective care that emerged within Puerto Rican communities and social movements.

In addition, this book centers specifically on Puerto Rican women’s political activism focused around care work and social reproduction. I build on feminist scholarship and social reproduction theory that have argued that political struggles over social reproduction have long raged under capitalism and colonialism and that overlooking these histories of political mobilization has often served to erase women’s activism from history. As Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser have argued, “class struggle includes struggles over social reproduction,” which cover a wide range of battles, including those for health care, education, and women’s liberation.⁵⁰ I also on build on Jessica Wilkerson’s argument that an examination of “caring labor is fundamental to understanding the limitations and successes of social and political movements that sought to expand democracy and citizenship rights.”⁵¹ In her work on US women’s political activism, she underscores how their politicization of “caregiving labor” offered powerful “critiques of capitalist logics.”⁵² This book also emphasizes that examining Puerto Rican women’s activism around care work and social reproduction can shed new light on class struggles and fights for social justice.

This book shows how in Puerto Rican history the development of welfare programs is integral to a broader labor history and histories of care, as some women emerged as state agents and architects of the state and others became targets of both government labor recruitment and management schemes and clients of social welfare programs.⁵³ This labor history is twofold. On the one hand, it shows how the creation of social welfare programs required a massive amount of work. Over the course of the twentieth century, a group of women became professionalized as social workers and, in turn, played a large role in building welfare programs in Puerto Rico. These professional care workers crafted social welfare programs in ways that

reflected their political agendas and that conditioned the political aspirations of Puerto Rican communities throughout the twentieth century. On the other hand, this is also a labor history of women on welfare. It argues that clients of welfare programs were mainly working-class women, many of whom were care workers, who provided essential productive and reproductive labor in their communities.⁵⁴ When these women became clients of social welfare programs, they entered new roles and were cast in new relationships to state institutions. The book traces the emergence of these two groups of care workers and the interactions between them and the larger communities in which they lived.

The book also traces how the profession of social work changed over time and became more community oriented. As growing numbers of working-class women entered its ranks, they brought their own ideas and concerns into the profession. They advocated for the creation of social welfare programs that responded to the needs of welfare recipients and that were accountable to local communities. An early move toward more community-oriented work can be seen in the 1930s with the training of social workers (and social work aides) within New Deal programs. However, the community input in these moments was limited as the expansion of state-run social welfare programs emphasized a top-down structure within social welfare projects, which came to rely heavily on means-testing that often alienated local communities. The more revolutionary moment of transformation in the social work field came in the 1960s when the mass migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States opened a new space for social workers to become advocates for Puerto Rican communities. This advocacy would begin in the 1940s and would deepen as social workers increasingly connected their work to their involvement in civil rights and feminist organizing and struggles for civil rights, women's rights, and independence. Puerto Rican social workers became deeply involved with the expansion of the rise of a community-organizing approach in social work, which resulted in an even deeper commitment to working in collaboration with the communities they served. By the 1970s, the social work profession had become an important space of political organization for Puerto Rican women.

As I mentioned previously, I piece together the history of Puerto Ricans and social welfare programs by drawing on archives from social welfare agencies in Puerto Rico and the United States. These sources shed light on the history of Puerto Rican women, who were everywhere, busy shaping politics and history. From social workers navigating the highest levels of politics (lobbying Congress for the extension of federal social provisions) to working-class

clients demanding access to social provisions, women emerged as political actors in varied and complex ways. I also use the case file archives of Puerto Rican social welfare agencies to track the new interactions between Puerto Ricans and the state that resulted from the creation of social welfare programs. One of these archives is the massive bureaucratic archive of the Department of Social Welfare in Puerto Rico, whose records provide fleeting glimpses into a history of massive social transformation. Its files contain stories about the Puerto Rican government's interventions in the lives of working-class Puerto Ricans. The files also reveal how the creation of social welfare programs impacted Puerto Ricans and how they laid claim to new social provisions. I use my exploration of these files as a way to trace major social changes while also focusing on specific political histories of women's lives and work.

An examination of the lives and work of Puerto Rican social workers, this book offers a unique window into the history of Puerto Rican organizing. At the start of the twentieth century, women's professionalization in care work occupations such as social work and nursing opened up new opportunities to build and shape both state and private institutions.⁵⁵ Scholars have demonstrated that the work of professional care workers was particularly important to the development of imperial projects globally and to the expansion of US empire specifically. For example, historian Catherine Ceniza Choy has highlighted how training women to be nurses in the Philippines advanced US imperial goals while laying the foundation for labor recruitment to the metropole and thus paving the way for future migrations.⁵⁶ I show how, in Puerto Rico, women were also called on to be agents of transformation under US imperial projects and were sometimes later recruited to the United States to further these projects. I also highlight how, in the Puerto Rican diaspora and the United States, professional women played an important role in organizing institutions that served migrant communities.⁵⁷ Social work and political activism were far from separate.

The histories of social workers in this book also specifically focus on their political work, centering them in political history, which has often overlooked women in favor of the activism of male leaders and political parties. This book shows how social workers were leaders in a wide range of political organizations and moments of political mobilization. They were active in the Puerto Rican movements for independence, commonwealth, and statehood as well as within labor and feminist groups. I also suggest that social workers' stories reveal some significant particularities about Puerto Rican women's political organizing. First, I show how social workers balanced

their work seeking larger political outcomes (including participation in political organizations and parties) with their day-to-day efforts to care for other people, a type of praxis that was often grounded in their work in local communities. Second, these histories show how social workers oftentimes worked together across divides in political beliefs and ideologies toward common goals. Through collaborating in their jobs and professional organizations, they sometimes built surprising allegiances that allowed them to advance their broader agenda. By excavating the forms of political organization developed by these women and considering the implications of the political collaborations they forged, I hope to shed new light on Puerto Rican politics.

By focusing on biographies of social worker activists whose work was also linked to social movements and community organizing, I emphasize women whose work would likely have been defined as radical in their time. My use of biography and prosopography to explore the history of social movements draws on feminist scholarship on Latina and African American women that has examined individual life histories to make sense of major social changes.⁵⁸ While the histories they reveal are not comprehensive, they shed light on social work as a complex terrain of politics in which women shaped history. For Puerto Rican women, this included participating in early efforts to create labor standards and protections for women and child workers, advocating for the independence and the decolonization of Puerto Rico and participating in the US civil rights movement. These efforts share similarities with those developed by other colonized women and women of color in the United States, who have sometimes used professional care work as an avenue through which to contest violence and oppression in their communities. My research is particularly in dialogue with histories of social work that have highlighted the intersection of social worker activism with movements for social justice and labor, as well as civil and economic rights.⁵⁹

This book also grapples with the painful repercussions of practices developed by social workers in Puerto Rican communities. It is important to note that not all social workers were heroes and that their actions sometimes resulted in long-lasting difficulties for poor people, especially when the discourse and rhetoric they deployed emphasized that people were in poverty because of individual failures rather than broader social and economic structures or when they suggested that people needed to change to be deserving of benefits. They also administered casework and means-testing practices that were invasive and sometimes discriminatory against clients. In particular, the book explores the treatment of working-class women as they applied

for social welfare programs as well as how regulatory, invasive, and punitive practices of means-testing were created as a part of social welfare programs. The production of social welfare projects was plagued by the damaging consequences of the deployment of Americanization and modernization discourse, the separation of families under the guise of child saving, and the role of social workers in eugenics and sterilization projects that led to reproductive injustice in working-class communities. More generally, adverse outcomes often resulted from trying to adjust individuals to the conditions they faced rather than pushing for broader societal and economic transformations that could result in better living conditions for all people.⁶⁰ Telling these difficult stories works to restore Puerto Rican women to history as political figures with complex and sometimes troubling legacies.

This book also tells the stories of Puerto Rican women and girls who became clients of social welfare programs. I include the experiences of mothers, daughters, children, and elders who made a life and a living in Puerto Rico and its diaspora during a period of great social transformation. Many of these individuals were also care workers—in their own homes and in the homes of others, of whom some were paid and others unpaid. These caring occupations were segregated by both gender and race, and many of these workers were given little or no choice in becoming care workers.⁶¹ Scholars of women and gender in the United States and Latin America have emphasized the importance of care work, domestic work, and household labor to the history of women's labor in both regions. For example, historians of care work and domestic labor have demonstrated how working-class women of color's experience of being "forced to care" has shaped their experience of citizenship and belonging in the United States and within the US empire. This book is in dialogue with scholars who have examined how working-class women of color's participation in caring labor has shaped their lives and how they have struggled for social change.⁶²

By focusing on the history of Puerto Rican women's labor as care workers, this book emphasizes the importance of race in Puerto Rican labor history as well as the persistence of discrimination against women of African descent.⁶³ Scholars of the history of care labor and domestic work have shown that racial hierarchies and discrimination have often been enacted through labor systems that have relegated African American, Indigenous, and Latina women into low-wage and precarious caring occupations. In this book, I consider how, in Puerto Rico, women and girls of African descent often made up much of the domestic work labor force and how occupational segregation in the mid-twentieth century remained connected to the legacy

of slavery on the archipelago. I also show how, after the US colonization of Puerto Rico, Puerto Rican women were recruited to work as domestic workers in the United States specifically because they were seen as racially inferior to US colonists and as well-suited for caring labor. Moreover, I show how Puerto Rican government agencies trained and placed Puerto Rican women as domestic workers in the United States as a part of state-sponsored labor migration schemes. When these workers arrived in the United States and became migrant workers, they were further racialized as nonwhite and faced rampant discrimination.⁶⁴ These examples show how caring labor was racialized and how working-class women, particularly those of African descent, experienced being funneled into care work positions in both Puerto Rico and the United States.

My investigation of the case files of social work programs also considers how working-class women and girls who performed domestic, service, and care work became a key demographic applying for social welfare benefits. Using the case files of social welfare agencies, I explore social workers' interventions in the lives and work of the working-class Puerto Ricans who became their clients, observing how state programs regulated Puerto Rican lives in particularly gendered and raced ways that often made them targets of regulation. Poor women and women of African descent became the primary targets of reform policies.⁶⁵ This book shows how social workers investigated women and children's caring labor in early studies of maternal health, managed work-relief programs for women during the New Deal, and developed casework processes that recorded women's labor in the first island-wide social welfare programs. Social workers were also instrumental in regulating the migration of Puerto Rican women to become domestic workers in the United States, and as agents of Puerto Rican government and US social welfare agencies in the United States, they came to work with migrant care workers in the United States.

Social work interviews were sites of struggle both among social workers and between social workers and clients over how benefits would be administered. Through a close reading of case files, I examine how clients negotiated the contents of their benefits with social workers in the intimate and often invasive process of social casework. Every individual applying for benefits underwent interviews with social workers in which the new roles of social worker and client were constructed and performed. Examining case files from social welfare offices, I show that social workers manifested the abstract political ideologies of the state into concrete social policy, in turn locating their clients within categories of gender, class, and race. Placement

into these categories had tangible material consequences for those seeking food, shelter, and care. Combined, these stories interrogate how clients were produced within the textual practices of casework and provide a glimpse of how the formation of social welfare programs and the meaning of women's labor were negotiated in interactions between state officials and citizens.

The records of social welfare agencies also offer a window into how social work practices developed and changed over the twentieth century as some forms of social work became more community oriented. While this book shows that this change over time was not always a linear or progressive narrative, and there were many moments of tension and solidarity between social workers and working-class clients, it demonstrates that community-oriented work has grown and developed as a part of the profession. This book reveals how, when social work practices were first developed in Puerto Rico in the 1920s, maternalist social reformers were mainly focused on reforming local populations and regulating forms of child labor within local communities. These maternalists cast themselves as more enlightened than the women they worked with. However, as increasing numbers of working-class women became a part of the profession, including those who had received social welfare benefits, growing numbers saw themselves as joining a struggle with their "clients" for social and economic rights for all people. The history of the development of more community-oriented social work as a part of the story of the profession is traced throughout this book, even though it was not always the path taken.

The history of Puerto Rican social workers of African descent is also a crucial part of the story about care work and social work told in this book. The stories told here often focus on the outsized role of Puerto Ricans of African descent in transforming the social work profession, making it more centered on community-engaged methods. In writing about these stories, I build on scholarship on the history of Afro-Puerto Rican participation in the history of social movements and in the civil rights movement in the United States in particular.⁶⁶ In the earlier chapters of the book, Puerto Rican women of African descent who had access to social work education like Beatriz Lassalle del Valle and Felicia Boria may have identified as white or as racially different than the working-class women of African descent who were their clients. However, the forms of social work they engaged in also reveal deep connections to social justice activism, socialist feminism, labor organizing, and broader agitation for social rights that may have been in part shaped by their own experiences of racialized social marginalization either in Puerto Rico or in relationship to Americans in the United States.

In the final chapter, the book centers fully on the work of social workers of African descent like Antonia Pantoja, Yolanda Sánchez, and Esperanza Martell, whose identifications as Afro-Puerto Rican and Black Puerto Rican were essential to their political work. These women were part of a broader group of Afro-Puerto Rican civil rights activists who used careers in social work to advance broader struggles against racism and for social justice.

The social welfare archives I examine in this book also provide a unique resource for considering how Puerto Ricans navigated displacement and migration over the twentieth century. Among other things, the archives reveal how migration was influenced by day-to-day interactions between Puerto Ricans and the state as well as by state-sponsored labor migration schemes. I trace the movements of state agents, migrant workers, and clients of social welfare programs between Puerto Rico and the United States by using social welfare records from both locations. These movements reveal how the Puerto Rican government increasingly served as an intermediary between thousands of migrant Puerto Ricans and US government agencies, both federal and local. I also examined bundles of documents that were mailed between these offices and that contained case file information about Puerto Rican clients. These archives reveal how a colonial state organized and circulated information about its citizens over decades. They also shed light on how individuals navigated these dramatic social changes and how some went on to build lives and communities in the United States.

THIS BOOK IS ORGANIZED chronologically and thematically, focusing on the care work and political activism of Puerto Rican social workers and working-class women care workers between 1917 and the 1970s. Each chapter considers Puerto Rican histories on the archipelago and the United States, following protagonists on the move and emphasizing the impact of displacement and migration on Puerto Rican communities. Part 1 of the book, “Making Care Count in Puerto Rico,” focuses on the US colonization of Puerto Rico and the history of the construction of social welfare programs on the archipelago. Part 2, “Care Work and Women’s Activism in the Puerto Rican Diaspora,” centers on Puerto Rican migration to the United States and highlights the ways that Puerto Rican social welfare agencies, policies, and programs were instrumental in shaping labor migration and the integration of migrants into US communities after 1940. The book concludes by emphasizing the development of Puerto Rican forms of community-oriented social work practice in the United States, practices that were connected to earlier struggles

over social and economic rights but that also sought new ways to make social welfare provisions better serve their communities.

The book begins by examining the creation of social welfare programs in Puerto Rico under US colonial rule, paying particular attention to Puerto Rican women social workers and the working-class women and children who became targets of their reforms. The first chapter, “Women Building Social Welfare Programs in Puerto Rico after 1917,” argues that social workers used their professional occupations as care workers to organize politically for the extension of social policy to Puerto Rico despite the continued restrictions on citizenship imposed by US colonialism. It shows how they worked alongside US reformers of the US Children’s Bureau to conduct a study of maternal and child welfare in Puerto Rico that was used as evidence to support their advocacy for the extension of US social welfare provisions like those created by the Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Protection Act. Questions about Puerto Rican citizenship and belonging were paramount in these debates. I show how the extension of partial and provisional funding under these policies resulted from political organizing, setting a precedent for a century of struggle over the form that social policies would take. While the number of people covered under these social welfare programs remained small, these nascent programs would rapidly expand in the following years.

In Puerto Rico, political organizing for social welfare would come to a head after the Great Depression with the extension of specific reforms administered under the New Deal. These reforms would transform the relationship between the US government and Puerto Rico by reworking and reinforcing the colonial status of the archipelago. In Chapter 2, “Labor, Welfare, and Gendered Citizenship in New Deal Puerto Rico,” I show how Puerto Rican women (both social workers and working-class women) were instrumental in demanding and shaping social welfare policy and programs. By examining debates over the extension of the Social Security Act of 1935 to Puerto Rico, I highlight how Puerto Ricans waged a long struggle led by activists and workers to have the archipelago included under this legislation. This organizing led to the gradual and constrained incorporation of Puerto Rico under the act. In part, this coverage resulted from the organizing of women activists who advocated for labor standards and protections for women workers and demanded social provisions for women who provided caring and reproductive labor in their homes. However, this moment was also one in which working-class Puerto Rican women became prime targets of state

interventions through labor reforms and eugenics policies that were propelled by the expansion of social welfare agencies. The New Deal, therefore, resulted in more intrusion by the state into the private lives of Puerto Rican citizens.

In the 1940s and 1950s, social welfare programs continued to expand, and these programs transformed the relationship between the state and society by bringing more social workers into the homes of Puerto Rican families and communities. As working-class people claimed benefits, they also articulated demands for state support and care that they increasingly perceived as their rights as Puerto Rican citizens. Chapter 3, “Working-Class Women, Claims for Benefits, and the Politics of Deservingness under the Puerto Rican Populist State,” focuses on the experiences of working-class women care workers who became clients within these programs. These women applied for assistance from the newly minted Department of Public Welfare created by the populist programs of the PPD, which would further expand with the creation of the ELA in 1952. Through a focus on the case file records of working-class women care workers who sought assistance, this chapter shows how clients struggled over these benefits with social workers. The chapter examines how clients contested how information about their labor and income was recorded and sought to shape the outcome of their petitions. At the same time, social welfare programs became increasingly regulatory as they focused on means-testing and separating out clients who they deemed deserving of benefits from those they believed were not. The outcome of tense struggles between social workers and clients that took shape in this moment was that working-class women’s reproductive labor was minimized and devalued. Moreover, clients of social welfare programs were increasingly cast in broader social and political discourses as nonproductive and undeserving citizens.

During the same period, Puerto Rican communities were deeply impacted by migration to the United States, some of which resulted from state-sponsored labor migration schemes. Both Puerto Rican social workers and working-class women care workers became essential participants in these efforts, and their work was instrumental in establishing new and expanding Puerto Rican communities in the United States. Chapter 4, “Care Workers, Household Labor Organizing, and Puerto Rican Migration after 1944,” examines the history of a group of Puerto Rican domestic workers in a contract-labor program in Chicago who ended up at the center of a storm of labor activism, reform, and regulation. When these migrant domestic workers faced terrible conditions in the United States, they organized protests and soon found support from US women reformers who were already fighting

for labor standards for household workers. Their activism also drew the attention of Puerto Rican social workers and students studying in Chicago. These professional women became intermediaries between the workers and the Puerto Rican state, and eventually the tensions over the labor issues in Chicago put pressure on the government to reform its migrant labor programs. These actions contributed to the formalization of this oversight of state-sponsored migration with the creation of a new regulatory agency, the Migration Division of the Puerto Rican Department of Labor. As a result, the Puerto Rican government also realized that the expertise Puerto Rican social workers had developed while studying and working in social welfare programs in the United States could provide a crucial bridge between the Puerto Rican government and local agencies in US cities.

As representatives of the Puerto Rican government operating in the United States, Puerto Rican social workers took up new roles working in the United States as advocates for migrant clients. In Chapter 5, “Women’s Leadership in Struggles over Welfare, Citizenship Rights, and Decolonization in the Puerto Rican Diaspora,” I highlight the role of two groups of women: first, Puerto Rican women who became migrant advocates and the architects of state agencies that regulated migration and, second, working-class migrant women who became their clients. This chapter considers how these groups interacted within the Migration Division’s offices throughout the United States. The Migration Division also created a Social Service Section, managed by social workers whose case files I use to trace the development of new casework practices for migrant clients. In these offices, social workers served as intermediaries between migrant clients and US social welfare agencies and bound together the work of Puerto Rican and US social welfare programs. As migration experts, these social workers also worked on behalf of Puerto Rican citizens and successfully advocated for broader coverage of Puerto Rico under US social policy. At the same time, the Puerto Rican migrants who became their clients demanded that the agency take up a more robust role in advocating for their civil and economic rights. As a result, some social workers connected to the Migration Division also began challenging the Puerto Rican government’s agenda and imagining new ways of doing Puerto Rican-led social justice work in the United States.

The 1960s ushered in a new period in Puerto Rican social work history in the United States focused on community organizing. During this time, many more poor and working-class women (including some who had received welfare benefits themselves) trained to become social workers and entered the profession. Some of these social workers would turn away from traditional

social work practices and instead build service programs and institutions that were more focused on accountability within local communities. The final chapter, “Community Organizers, Civil Rights Activism, and Demands for Care in Puerto Rican Communities in the United States,” examines how some of these social workers developed Puerto Rican forms of community-oriented work in New York City. It particularly looks at the life history of Antonia Pantoja, an Afro-Puerto Rican social worker and civil rights activist who migrated from Puerto Rico to the United States and worked tirelessly to create Puerto Rican-serving social and educational programs. Pantoja was a member of a cohort of like-minded activists, including the already-mentioned Yolanda Sánchez. The work of these activists was also deeply connected to contemporary grassroots social movements, and the chapter tracks how social workers used their professional work as a platform to advocate for social justice. Their work as educators would also have lasting impacts; they trained a new generation of community organizers who would soon emerge as leaders in the Puerto Rican community. This chapter concludes by considering the broader intellectual and political legacy of this generation of social workers as they helped found departments of Puerto Rican and ethnic studies in US educational institutions.

The form of activism that emerged around access to social welfare provisions and benefits in Puerto Rican communities on the archipelago and the United States continued in the following decades. An epilogue, “Envisioning Caring Futures,” provides a final analysis of how considering the long history of Puerto Rican struggles for access to social welfare and care—with Puerto Rican women at the center—can shed light on how Puerto Ricans have defined citizenship and contested colonialism in the twentieth century. It shows the enduring relevance of the history of social welfare more broadly by documenting connections to contemporary struggles over the extension of social policy, particularly the Social Security Act. This book makes the case that curtailments to Puerto Rican citizenship inscribed into early forms of social policy on the archipelago still provide a foundation for contemporary inequalities with deeply troubling legacies. The US Congress continues to decide on a case-by-case basis what parts of social legislation will be applied to Puerto Rico without Puerto Rican input. Furthermore, colonial restrictions on social welfare benefits continue to be fiercely contested and debated by Puerto Ricans on the archipelago and in the diaspora. However, despite this struggle, colonialism remains in Puerto Rico, and the citizenship rights of Puerto Ricans continue to be provisional, tenuous, and fragile.

It is my hope that this book contributes to ongoing dialogues about Puerto Rican history, citizenship, and community formation by offering a story of the politics of care work that is rooted in the lives and experiences of Puerto Rican women. The life histories and biographies of women at the heart of this book are meant to breathe life into political history—from which they have often been missing. These stories aim to shed light on the complex forms of political mobilization that emerged from Puerto Rican women's day-to-day experiences and led to lasting changes in their communities. The political action of these women was remarkable; it crossed national boundaries, challenged colonial governance, and imagined new futures for their communities. Moreover, contemporary struggles over Puerto Rican citizenship continue to be both led and supported by Puerto Rican women care workers despite the enduring colonial exclusions and marginalization that such women face. In the future, I hope that the stories of women like these will be considered key parts of the history of Puerto Rican struggles for social justice and also help to historicize ongoing political organization for care.

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Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. Paris-Chitanvis, "Yolanda Sánchez," 98.
2. Paris-Chitanvis, "Yolanda Sánchez," 93.
3. For more on the history of social work and community organizing during this period, see Pantoja, *Memoir of a Visionary*.
4. On the life and work of Yolanda Sánchez, see Alberto Maldonado, *Portraits of the Puerto Rican Experience*, 77–78. Also see the interview with Sánchez in Morales, *Puerto Rican Poverty and Migration*, 174–79; Bell, *East Harlem Remembered*; "CUSSW Mourns the Death of Alumna Yolanda Sánchez, Powerhouse in El Barrio," Columbia University, School of Social Work, accessed October 15, 2024, <https://www.columbia.edu/cu/ssw/news/2012-june/cussw-loss-mourned.html>; "PRdream Mourns the Passing of Yolanda Sánchez, 1932–2012," PRdream, accessed October 15, 2024, <http://www.prdream.com/wordpress/topics/2012/06/3604/>; "In Memoriam: Yolanda Sánchez, MS Social Work," National Association of Social Workers, New York City Chapter, September/October 2012, <https://www.naswnyc.org/general/custom.asp?page=363>.
5. Trips like this one meant to connect Puerto Ricans in the United States with the archipelago. Some of these trips were also sponsored by the Puerto Rican government. For more, see Pantoja, *Memoirs of a Visionary*.
6. For more on Yolanda Sánchez and tenants' rights activism, see Gold, *When Tenants Claimed the City*.
7. "Yolanda Sánchez, 1932–2012," Latino Education: National Latino Education Research and Policy Project, Northeast Region, accessed October 15, 2024, <https://openuncny.org/nlerap4ne/2012/06/yolanda-sanchez-1932-2012/>.
8. Morales, *Puerto Rican Poverty and Migration*, 174–79. For more on Puerto Rican feminist organizing during this period, see Muzio, *Radical Imagination*; Carroll, *Mobilizing New York*; Morales, *Through the Eyes of Rebel Women*.
9. Paris-Chitanvis, "Yolanda Sánchez," 96.
10. For more on the history of social work in Puerto Rico, see Burgos Ortiz, *Pioneras de la profesión de trabajo social en Puerto Rico*. On the history of social workers in carceral fields, see Ortiz Díaz, *Raising the Living Dead*.
11. On the history of Puerto Rican citizenship, see Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen*; Sánchez Korrol, *From Colonia to Community*; Erman, *Almost Citizens*; McGreevey,

Borderline Citizens; Cabán, *Constructing a Colonial People*; Burnett and Marshall, *Foreign in a Domestic Sense*.

12. For more on the Puerto Rican economy and poverty levels, see Collins, Bosworth, and Soto-Class, *The Economy of Puerto Rico*.

13. Studies on the history of social welfare in the United States include Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled*; Abramovitz, *Regulating the Lives of Women*; Ward, *The White Welfare State*; Fox, *Three Worlds of Relief*. Studies of the history of social welfare in Latin America include Guy, *Women Build the Welfare State*; Sanders, *Gender and Welfare in Mexico*; Blum, *Domestic Economies*.

14. One notable exception is sociologist Marietta Morrissey, who has written about the history of the extension of social welfare policy to Puerto Rico. See Morrissey, "The Making of a Colonial Welfare State." The Puerto Rican government also commissioned a study of the differential payments made to Puerto Ricans under these programs. See Cabranes, *A Study of Federal Public Assistance Payments to Puerto Rico*.

15. For example, Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans have not often been included in major studies on social welfare and social work in the United States, like Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*; Gordon, *Pitied but not Entitled*; Walkowitz, *Working with Class*.

16. In the context of Latin America, studies of gender and the state have emphasized the importance of thinking about the connections between labor, citizenship, and social policy. See, for example, Dore and Molyneux, *Hidden Histories of Gender and the State in Latin America*; French and James, *The Gendered Worlds of Latin American Women Workers*; Macpherson, *From Colony to Nation*; Putnam, *The Company They Kept*; Tinsman, *Partners in Conflict*; Olcott, *Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico*; Roseblatt, *Gendered Compromises*; Sanders, *Gender and Welfare in Mexico*; Putnam, "Citizenship from the Margins."

17. In recent years historians have examined how social welfare and struggles over social citizenship have shaped the experiences of colonized and migrant people within the context of European empires and colonialism. Many of these studies have been transnational and examined how imperialism and social welfare policies have impacted immigrants and migrants. See, for example, Bailkin, *The Afterlife of Empire*; Nasiali, *Native to the Republic*; Midgley and Piachaud, *Colonialism and Welfare*.

18. For more on the colonial history of social welfare, social work, and social policy in Puerto Rico, see Guardiola Ortiz, *El trabajo social en Puerto Rico*; Burgos Ortiz, *Pioneras de la profesión de trabajo social en Puerto Rico*; Reyes, *Sobrevivencia, pobreza, y "mantengo"*.

19. Guy, *Women Build the Welfare State*, 3.

20. For more on the Archivo General de Puerto Rico, see Findlay, *We Are Left without a Father Here*, 13–23.

21. Here I look at the records of the Offices of the Government of Puerto Rico in the United States Records held at the Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, City University of New York (hereafter cited as OGPRUS).

22. For more on the history of migration from Puerto Rico to the United States, see Duany, *Blurred Borders*.

23. I draw on the methods of migration scholars and those who have done transnational history. In the Puerto Rican context, the use of *transnational* is complicated because of the continued colonial status of the island. For more information, see Duany, *Blurred Borders*; García-Colón, *Colonial Migrants at the Heart of Empire*. For examples of transnational historical scholarship, see Hoffnung-Garskof, *A Tale of Two Cities*; Putnam, *Radical Moves*.

24. For more on the history of US colonialism in the Spanish Caribbean, see McCoy and Scarano, *The Colonial Crucible*. On the United States imagining its colonial endeavors in Puerto Rico as benevolent, see Findlay, "Love in the Tropics."

25. Findlay, "Love in the Tropics," 141; Findlay, *Imposing Decency*.

26. Briggs, *Reproducing Empire*. See also Flores Ramos, *Eugenesia, higiene pública y alcañfor para las pasiones*.

27. On the construction of Puerto Rican citizenship, see Erman, "Meanings of Citizenship in the U.S. Empire"; Erman, *Almost Citizens*; McGreevey, *Borderline Citizens*.

28. Burnett and Marshall, *Foreign in a Domestic Sense*.

29. Burnett and Marshall, *Foreign in a Domestic Sense*, 384.

30. Mathews, *Puerto Rican Politics and the New Deal*.

31. Building on historian Linda Gordon, this book considers the evolution of the definition of "welfare" in the United States as a set of state policies of social provision created for poor citizens—including specific public assistance programs—not the full spectrum of social provisions created by the state. See Gordon, "What Is Welfare?" in *Pitied but Not Entitled*.

32. See Morrissey, "Making of a Colonial Welfare State."

33. The reforms that they promised included ones that would regulate US sugar trusts and redistribute land to the working class. See, for example, García-Colón, *Land Reform in Puerto Rico*.

34. For more on the PPD during this period, see Dietz, *Negotiating Development and Change*; Findlay, *We Are Left without a Father Here*.

35. Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects*.

36. Despite protests, in 1953 the United Nations General Assembly decided that Puerto Rico would no longer be considered a colonial possession because it determined that the island met the standards of self-government outlined in its own agenda. Trias Monge, *Puerto Rico*, 124–27, 136–40.

37. Duany, *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move*; Whalen and Vázquez-Hernández, *The Puerto Rican Diaspora*; García-Colón, *Colonial Migrants at the Heart of Empire*; Meléndez, *Sponsored Migration*.

38. Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen*.

39. Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen*; Sánchez Korrol, *From Colonia to Community*.

40. García-Colón, *Colonial Migrants at the Heart of Empire*; Meléndez, *Sponsored Migration*.

41. The Puerto Rican government had created the Puerto Rican Bureau of Employment and Identification in 1930, which helped Puerto Rican migrant workers; this effort

was later expanded in 1948 into the Employment and Migration Bureau, which finally became the Migration Division of the Puerto Rican Department of Labor in 1951. For more on this agency, see Thomas, *Puerto Rican Citizen*; Duany, *Blurred Borders*.

42. See, for example, Baerga, *Género y trabajo*; Silvestrini, “Women as Workers”; Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia*; Ortiz, *Puerto Rican Women and Work*; Findlay, *We Are Left without a Father Here*; Benmayor et al., *Stories to Live By*; Sánchez Korrol, *From Colonial to Community*.

43. For US history, see, for example, Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*; Romero, *Maid in the U.S.A.*; Boris and Klein, *Caring for America*; Glenn, *Forced to Care*; Glenn, *Unequal Freedom*; Nadasen, *Household Workers Unite*; May, *Unprotected Labor*; Urban, *Brokering Servitude*; Ervin, *Gateway to Equality*. For Latin America and the Caribbean, see, for example, Matos Rodríguez, *Women and Urban Change in San Juan, Puerto Rico, 1820–1868*; Hicks, *Hierarchies at Home*; Chaney et al., *Muchachas No More*; Blum, *Domestic Economies*.

44. For example, see Nadasen, *Care*; Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization*; Parreñas, *The Force of Domesticity*; Wilkerson, *To Live Here, You Have to Fight*; Fraser, *Fortunes of Feminism*; Boris and Klein, *Caring for America*; Boris and Parreñas, *Intimate Labors*; Boris, *Making the Woman Worker*; Glenn, *Forced to Care*; Duffy, *Making Care Count*; Tungohan, *Care Activism*; Bhattacharya, *Social Reproduction Theory*; Ferguson, *Women and Work*; Francisco-Menchavez, *The Labor of Care*; Briggs, *How All Politics Became Reproductive Politics*.

45. Glenn, *Forced to Care*, 6.

46. Boris and Klein, *Caring for America*, 5.

47. Boris and Klein, *Caring for America*, 5.

48. Nadasen, *Care*, 15–16.

49. Boris, “The Racialized Gendered State”; Boris, “Force and the Shadow of Precarity.”

50. Aruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser, *Feminism for the 99%*, 24. For more on social reproduction theory, see Fraser, *Fortunes of Feminism*; Bhattacharya, *Social Reproduction Theory*.

51. Wilkerson, *To Live Here, You Have to Fight*, 3.

52. Wilkerson, *To Live Here, You Have to Fight*, 14.

53. In thinking about the gendered labor of welfare state building, I draw on Donna Guy’s work on Argentina. Guy, *Women Build the Welfare State*.

54. Here I draw on the perspectives of scholars writing about the history of welfare as well as welfare recipients organizing for “welfare rights.” Orleck, *Storming Caesar’s Palace*; Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*; Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing*; Kornbluh, *The Battle for Welfare Rights*.

55. See, for example, D’Antonio, *American Nursing*; Threat, *Nursing Civil Rights*; Hine, *Black Women in White*; Reisch and Andrews, *The Road Not Taken*; Walkowitz, *Working with Class*; Bell, *The Black Power Movement and American Social Work*; Dowden-White, *Groping toward Democracy*.

56. Choy, *Empire of Care*.

57. Here I build on the scholars who have examined the role of professional women in Puerto Rican communities in the United States. See Sánchez Korrol, “In Search

of Unconventional Women”; Sánchez Korrol, “The Forgotten Migrant”; Rúa, *Latino Urban Ethnography and the Work of Elena Padilla*.

58. My use of biography and prosopography builds on the work of scholars writing about women's history, particularly those focused on African American and Latina women, who have used life histories as a means to examine the history of gender and race in the United States. Examples of such work include Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*; Taylor, *The Veiled Garvey*; Schechter, *Exploring the Decolonial Imaginary*; Ruiz and Sánchez Korrol, *Latina Legacies*; Cotera, *Native Speakers*; Pérez Rosario, *Becoming Julia de Burgos*; Marino, *Feminism for the Americas*; Blain, *Set the World on Fire*; Wilkerson, *To Live Here, You Have to Fight*.

59. For an example of this type of work, see Bell, *The Black Power Movement and American Social Work*.

60. This idea was clearly articulated by Antonia Pantoja in describing her social work practice. See Pantoja, *Memoir of a Visionary*.

61. Glenn, *Forced to Care*.

62. For examples of powerful histories of the connection between caring labor, struggles for social change, and social rights in the United States, see Hunter, *To Joy My Freedom*; Boris, *Home to Work*; Boris and Klein, *Caring for America*; Nadasen, *Household Workers Unite*; Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors*; Orleck, *Storming Caesar's Palace*; Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing*; Kornbluh, *The Battle for Welfare Rights*; Wilkerson, *To Live Here, You Have to Fight*.

63. For more on the history of race and domestic labor in Puerto Rico, see Matos Rodríguez, *Women and Urban Change in Puerto Rico*; Crespo, “Domestic Work and Racial Divisions in Women's Employment in Puerto Rico, 1899–1930.”

64. On the history of Puerto Rican domestic workers in the United States, see, for example, Whalen, *From Puerto Rico to Philadelphia*; Rúa, *A Grounded Identidad*; Toro-Morn, “Gender, Class, Family, and Migration.”

65. For more on the history of race, people of African descent, and social work in Puerto Rico in the 1950s, see Del Moral, “‘Una niña humilde y de color.’”

66. On the participation of Afro-Puerto Ricans in social movements, see, for example, Denis-Rosario, *Drops of Inclusivity*; Román and Flores, *The Afro-Latin@ Reader*; Hoffung-Garskof, *Racial Migrations*; Fernández, *The Young Lords*; Lee, *Building a Latino Civil Rights Movement*; Lloréns, *Making Livable Worlds*.

CHAPTER 1. WOMEN BUILDING SOCIAL WELFARE PROGRAMS IN PUERTO RICO AFTER 1917

1. Bary and the Children's Bureau, *Child Welfare in the Insular Possessions of the United States, Part I*.

2. Bary and the Children's Bureau, *Child Welfare in the Insular Possessions of the United States, Part I*.

3. Beatriz Lassalle del Valle (who often published under the name Beatriz Lassalle) discussed her participation in the development of social welfare programs and the field of social work in various articles she published in Puerto Rican newspapers and social work journals. See, for example: Beatriz Lassalle, “Servicio Social: Un poco más