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Journal

Sociology of Race and Ethnicity, 5(1)

ISSN

2332-6492

Author

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Publication Date

2019

DOI

10.1177/2332649218776031

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Race and the Empire-state: Puerto Ricans' Unequal U.S. Citizenship

Sociology of Race and Ethnicity

2019, Vol. 5(1) 26–40

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DOI: 10.1177/2332649218776031

sre.sagepub.com

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Abstract

Contemporary theorizing regarding citizenship emphasizes the legal and social significance of citizenship status. Citizenship awards individuals a formal status and exclusive rights while also granting them membership into a national community. This study investigates tenets of liberal citizenship by examining the meaning of U.S. citizenship for Puerto Ricans. Drawing on 98 in-depth interviews with Puerto Ricans in Orlando, Florida, this study finds incongruences between theoretical understandings of citizenship and the experience of citizenship on the ground. Specifically, respondents define U.S. citizenship as a formal status and a set of rights; however, they express that their U.S. citizen status does not grant them membership into the American community. This study captures incompatibilities between legal and social dimensions of citizenship. I argue Puerto Ricans' understandings of and experiences with U.S. citizenship stem from (1) the state's marking Puerto Rico (as a place) and Puerto Ricans (as a people) as different and inferior and (2) racialization processes that conflate *Latino* with *foreign* and *racial other*. I advance the argument here that Puerto Ricans have a colonial/racialized citizenship constituted by unequal citizen status, differentiated citizen rights, and exclusion from the American national imaginary. As such, this study highlights the stratified structure of the institution of U.S. citizenship.

Keywords

citizenship, Puerto Ricans, colonialism, racialization, Latinos

What is the meaning of citizenship? What are the sites of citizenship? Who can claim and enact citizenship? These are some of the questions driving the renewed interest in the concept of citizenship (Bosniak 2006). This renewed intellectual conversation stems in part from processes of migration, globalization, and transnationalism that have increased the mobility of people, goods, ideas, and attachments across political borders (Castles and Davidson 2000; Rocco 2014). A primary concern of citizenship scholarship has been to understand how the influx of culturally, linguistically, and ethnoracially diverse populations challenges principles of modern citizenship and alters the concept's overall meaning (Bloemraad, Korteweg, and Yurdakul 2008). In fact, this inquiry has led to new formulations of citizenship, including global, post-national, and transnational citizenships.¹

Yet scholars maintain that at its core, citizenship continues to be a political concept (Brubaker 1989;

Bosniak 2000, 2006; Joppke 2010). Drawing on liberal conceptualizations, these scholars emphasize citizenship's conveyance of formal belonging to a defined political community and simultaneous denoting of membership into the imagined national community (Walzer 1983; Brubaker 1989, 1992; Bosniak 2000, 2006). Citizenship also defines who has full rights and complete access to political, economic, and social institutions (Marshall 1950). Furthermore, because citizenship is an exclusive social good, its protection and preservation is contingent on excluding those deemed outsiders

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(Walzer 1983; Bosniak 2006). Drawing on these prevailing understandings, much of the contemporary conversation has focused on how growing noncitizen populations, diasporas abroad, and expanding rights regimes challenge and reconfigure modern citizenship and membership.²

However, another line of work questions liberal nation-centered citizenship and membership frameworks altogether. This scholarship emphasizes the exclusionary citizenship experienced by ethnic-racial, gender, and religious minority groups in modern societies (Young 1990; Oboler 2006; Yuval-Davis 2011). In the case of the United States, proponents of this view argue that nation building was not guided by the democratic ideals of achieving congruency between territory and nation; rather, nation building was contingent on creating “hierarchically differentiated” spaces and peoples, which produced marginal forms of belonging (Jung 2011:3). Others point to the historical role of race for determining access to U.S. citizenship and the rights and protections accorded by this status (Bonilla-Silva and Mayorga 2011). And those who focus on the experiences of Latinos contend that racialization is critical for understanding Latinos’ relationship to U.S. citizenship (Rocco 2014).

This study intervenes in contemporary citizenship scholarship by examining the meaning of and experiences with U.S. citizenship of Puerto Ricans. Puerto Rico has been a U.S. territory since 1898, and island Puerto Ricans have been U.S. citizens since 1917. Because of this political relationship, large numbers of Puerto Ricans have migrated to the continental United States for more than a century. Drawing on the experiences of 98 Puerto Ricans in Orlando, Florida, I illuminate tensions in mainstream citizenship theorizing. Specifically, I find that while U.S. citizenship means formal status and rights for Puerto Ricans, it has not granted them full membership into the American polity. Thus, this study captures incompatibilities between legal definitions of citizenship and social conceptions of membership. I argue that Puerto Ricans’ understandings of and experiences with U.S. citizenship stem from (1) the state’s marking Puerto Rico (as a place) and Puerto Ricans (as a people) as different and inferior and (2) racialization processes that have led to the conflation of *Latino* with *foreign* and *racial other*. In agreement with Smith (1997, 2017) and Barreto and Lozano (2017), I contend that U.S. citizenship is stratified. I argue that Puerto Ricans have a colonial/racialized citizenship constituted by an unequal citizen status, differentiated citizen rights, and exclusion from the American³ national imaginary.

LITERATURE

Modern Citizenship, the Nation-state, and Membership

Contemporary citizenship scholarship has identified and explained the multiple meanings of modern citizenship (Bosniak 2000, 2006; Bloemraad et al. 2008). At its simplest level, citizenship is a legal status that represents formal membership in a political community; as such, citizenship as status distinguishes between citizens and foreigners (Brubaker 1989; Joppke 2010; Castles and Davidson 2000; Bosniak 2000, 2006). Modern citizenship is founded on principles that emphasize freedom, rights, and equality; consequently, it confers social, civil, and political rights as well as duties and responsibilities to all citizens (Marshall 1950; Rawls 1985; Bosniak 2000). Because citizenship grants exclusive political rights, citizens engage in self-governance through their participation in the political system and democratic processes (Bosniak 2000, 2006; Bloemraad et al. 2008). Last, citizenship represents a subjective experience. That is, citizenship conveys a sense of belonging to the broader national community and sharing a sense of solidarity with others (Bosniak 2000, 2006; Bloemraad et al. 2008).

Political and social belonging are key features of modern citizenship. This stems from their intimate relationship with the nation-state model. This model presumes that the parameters of the territorial political unit (the state) overlap with the parameters of “the people” (the nation) (Castles and Davidson 2000; Brubaker 2010). Thus, this conceptualization assumes a single state membership based on a correspondence between resident of the territory, formal citizen, and member of the nation. However, focusing on the impact of immigration on the state’s membership structure, sociologist Rogers Brubaker (1989, 1992) has advanced a more nuanced membership structure. He contends population movements have produced a multidimensional membership that includes a uniform core citizenry—those with political membership who are as such part of the “imagined community”—and resident foreigners—those who live in the state and participate in some institutions but lack full membership. While Brubaker (2010) has demonstrated that migrations challenge the correspondence between territory and nation assumed in traditional membership models, he emphasizes that in terms of membership, the major distinction is between citizens and noncitizens.

While mainstream citizenship scholarship has clarified the meanings and enactments of citizenship and emergent memberships in modern states, it

has not explored whether underlying tenets of democratic egalitarian citizenship hold. This line of work has not clarified whether all dimensions of citizenship are accessible to and experienced by various citizen populations. It does not address whether formal political membership (i.e., citizen status) is a sufficient condition for inclusion into the collective “we” (i.e., the peoplehood). And it is unknown whether the political and social uniformity foundational to modern citizenship actually characterizes the citizenry of modern states. Bosniak (2006) recognizes that liberal citizenship scholarship does not acknowledge distinctions *between citizens*, as a result, it treats citizenship as an “undifferentiated” category (p. 29). Karst (1989) similarly notes that in practice some groups are nominal citizens who lack substantive membership. And Brubaker (2010) acknowledges that “persisting legacies of empire” contribute to “deviations” in the nation-state model; nonetheless, he contends these “incongruencies” do not sufficiently challenge liberal citizenship and membership frameworks (p. 71). Despite these recognitions, there is a lack of substantive and theoretical engagement with these deviations in modern/liberal citizenship.

Empire-states, Coloniality, and Race

Another body of literature scrutinizes egalitarian and universal citizenship tied to the nation-state model. This scholarship argues that most nation-states have had territorial possessions or groups who lived in the state but were excluded from full belonging to the nation. Consequently, these places/groups were denied citizenship, endured de facto social and political exclusion, or have been forced to assimilate (Castles and Davidson 2000; Biolsi 2005). Focusing on the United States, Jung (2015) argues the United States is not a nation-state but rather an empire-state—a political entity that infringes upon the “sovereignty of foreign territories” and their inhabitants and that contains “territories of unequal political status” and populations that have differentiated rights and privileges (p. 59). The conquering of Indigenous lands and imposing of U.S. sovereignty on Indigenous nations are evidence of historic U.S. imperialistic tendencies. Further, territorial acquisitions of the nineteenth century and the subsequent creation of inferior political statuses that conferred different rights and protections show that the empire-state model applies. Ultimately, through expansion, exploitation, and colonial modes of incorporation, the United States created a “hierarchical differentiation” of “spaces and people” rather than political and social uniformity (Jung 2011:2).

Race scholars contend that traditional citizenship scholarship overlooks the historical and contemporary centrality of race in the United States. They note the category of citizen and notions of liberty and equality are misconceived as all inclusive, particularly because in the United States, citizenship has not been a neutral category (DeGenova and Ramos-Zayas 2003; Bonilla-Silva and Mayorga 2011). From the founding of the nation, White racial status was a precondition for citizenship, resulting in the exclusion of Blacks, Native Americans, and non-European immigrants from citizenship (Ngai 2004; Jung 2011; Masuoka and Junn 2013). Indeed, a restricted U.S. citizenship was necessary for executing a nation-building project premised on northern-western European descent and Eurocentric political, religious, and economic ideologies (Omi and Winant 1994). Even once racial minorities were granted citizenship, they were given inferior rights, legally segregated (Feagin 2006), excluded from government programs (Fox 2012), and allowed only a marginal participation in social institutions (Smith 1997; Oboler 2006). Therefore, the racial hierarchy has historically played a critical role in structuring political membership and conceptions of belonging in the United States (Masuoka and Junn 2013).

Political theorist Raymond Rocco (2014) argues that mainstream citizenship frameworks do not account for Latinos’ experiences with U.S. citizenship. He emphasizes disentangling political membership (i.e., being a citizen of the state) from social membership (i.e., being accepted as a member of the national community). Doing so reveals that Latinos have been excluded from the American imaginary despite their historic presence in the United States—an exclusion that stems from their racialization as *perpetual foreigners*. Others concur, adding this “outsider” status encompasses Latinos regardless of national-origin and generation status (Young 2000; Oboler 2006), while nativist and xenophobic rhetoric mark them as “illegal” and “invaders” (Chavez 2013). Flores-González (2017) finds ethnic and racial traits also position Latinos outside of the American community. Through daily experiences where Latino millennials are marginalized on the basis of their immigrant background, ancestry, culture, and phenotype, they learn they do not fit the White Anglo-Saxon Protestant “American prototype.” Thus, although they are U.S.-born citizens they understand they are not recognized as nor do they feel they are members of the American nation. Flores-González argues Latino youth experience an *ethnoracial citizenship*—a form of belonging characterized by their racial and cultural incompatibility

with dominant conceptions of American. Overall, these scholars show Latinos' racialization along dimensions of foreignness, criminality, and racial otherness limits their access to full U.S. citizenship.

Puerto Ricans' Unequal U.S. Citizenships

Puerto Rico's and Puerto Ricans' incomplete incorporation into the American nation is rooted in complex territorial and citizenship categories that have resulted in the peripheral existence of both. Puerto Ricans first entered the United States as stateless subjects (Meléndez 2013). Unlike previous annexations, Congress left Puerto Rico's and Puerto Ricans' political status and rights undefined when Puerto Rico was acquired via the Treaty of Paris (1898)⁴ (Baldoz and Ayala 2013). A few years later the Foraker Act (1900) officially annexed Puerto Rico, yet lawmakers ambiguously defined the island as both a *U.S. territory* in an international sense and *foreign* for constitutional purposes. This act also created Puerto Rican citizenship, marking the first time Congress refused to naturalize the residents of an annexed territory (Venator-Santiago 2013). Supreme Court decisions also have served as important mechanisms of exclusion. In *Downes v Bidwell* (1901) the Court created the "unincorporated" territorial category for the island, reasoning that Puerto Rico is a territory "*belonging to the United States, but is not part of the United States*" (Meléndez 2013:116, emphasis added). And in *Gonzalez v Williams* (1904) the Court denied Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship, instead relegating them to a liminal position as U.S. nationals who owed allegiance to the United States but possessed limited rights and lacked constitutional protections (Baldoz and Ayala 2013).

Eventually, the Jones Act (1917) collectively naturalized Puerto Ricans on the island by establishing a *jus sanguinis* (blood right) U.S. citizenship because Puerto Rico's territorial status remained unchanged. Despite becoming U.S. citizens, island Puerto Ricans were denied voting rights and representation in the U.S. Congress (Font-Guzmán 2013). This unequal citizenship was further institutionalized in *Balzac v People of Porto Rico* (1922), which upheld that Puerto Ricans are citizens who lack full constitutional rights. In 1940 Congress extended a statutory⁵ *jus soli* (birthright) U.S. citizenship to all individuals born in Puerto Rico without expanding their political rights (Venator-Santiago 2013). Today, Puerto Rico continues to be an unincorporated territory subject to the plenary power of the U.S. Congress (Jung 2015). This territorial status produces critical inequalities,

including unequal funding for federal programs in Puerto Rico, shipping laws that create trade disadvantages for the island, and exclusion from federal bankruptcy options for Puerto Rican public entities (Torruella 2017). Furthermore, island Puerto Ricans continue to have a second-class U.S. citizenship that is revocable and that grants inferior rights, protections, and political representation⁶ (Venator-Santiago 2013; Smith 2017).

Grosfoguel and Georas (2000) contend Puerto Ricans' current racialization is tied to this colonial legacy. The colonial relationship established unequal power and social relations that relegated the island and Puerto Ricans to a subordinate position. Because colonization is contingent on creating and maintaining a racial hierarchy (Mills 1997), representations of Puerto Ricans as culturally inferior, uncivilized, and ignorant justified the colonial project, while more contemporary depictions sustain coloniality by portraying them as lazy, welfare dependent, and criminal (Duany 2002; Grosfoguel 2003). As Puerto Ricans arrived in New York, they entered a society that institutionally and culturally privileged White/European populations, and although Puerto Ricans occupied a racially ambiguous position, they were still viewed as "other" by White Americans. Puerto Ricans' racialization was further compounded by their socioeconomic vulnerability, which stemmed from labor recruitment programs that used islanders as a source of cheap and disposable labor for mainland industries. Ultimately, Puerto Ricans were sorted into the bottom of the ethnoracial hierarchy near the position of Blacks. As such, Grosfoguel and Georas (2000) contend Puerto Ricans' incorporation into the United States is best characterized as colonial/racial subjects—a status emergent from colonial relations and racialization processes that constructed Puerto Ricans as socially and racially inferior.

Given dominant liberal understandings of citizenship and the historic relationship between Puerto Ricans and the United States, this study investigates the following questions: What does U.S. citizenship mean for Puerto Ricans? How do Puerto Ricans currently experience U.S. citizenship? What do Puerto Ricans' understandings of and experiences with U.S. citizenship reveal about the institution of U.S. citizenship?

DATA AND METHODS

Data for this paper come from 98 in-depth interviews with island- and mainland-born Puerto Ricans. Interviews were conducted in the Orlando Metropolitan Area from July 2015 to February 2016.

At the turn of the century, Florida—Orlando metro (Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford) more specifically—emerged as the new mainland destination for island and mainland Puerto Ricans. Florida is now home to the second largest Puerto Rican community stateside (1,067,747) (U.S. Census Bureau 2016) with nearly a third of the state's Puerto Rican population concentrated in Orlando metro (359,641) (U.S. Census Bureau 2016). This shift in Puerto Rican migratory patterns away from traditional mainland communities in the Northeast and Midwest to new areas in the U.S. South means Puerto Ricans are now settling in a distinct context. Not only is Orlando metro located in a politically conservative state; it is also in the Central Florida region, which lacks an extensive immigration history and where the Black/White binary dominates race relations.

I identified respondents through snowball sampling. I relied on key community informants with access to distinct social and professional networks to identify and recruit an initial wave of respondents. I then recruited additional study participants from interviewees' own networks. I also expanded my interview sample by recruiting respondents at community events and when I volunteered with local organizations. Respondents were selected to vary in education background, nativity, gender, and phenotype. Although respondents were between 25 and 70 years old, the median sample age was 40. The interview sample included long-term residents—ten years or more of residence in Orlando metro—and recent arrivals—residence in the region for five or fewer years.

Interviews lasted between 1.5 and 4.0 hours and were digitally recorded. Interviews were conducted at a location selected by respondents, most often at coffee shops or their homes. Respondents were given a \$25 monetary incentive once the interview was completed. Interviews were guided by a semi-structured questionnaire that ensured covering major topics of interest and allowed for the emergence of significant experiences in respondents' lives. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed in the language conducted (i.e., Spanish, English, and Spanglish) to preserve the integrity of the narratives. I used the online platform Dedoose to analyze interviews. The analytical strategy relied on an inductive and deductive coding approach; that is, it was guided by theory-driven and data-driven codes. For example, theory-driven codes included "meaning of citizenship" with subcodes "rights," "legal status," "participation," and "sense of belonging." Data-driven codes were generated by conducting an initial read of interviews and paying close attention

to themes emerging from narratives, including but not limited to "not accepted," "colony," "foreign," and "second-class citizen." I then systematically read through interviews and applied the deductive/inductive coding scheme to the interview text. I sorted interview segments by codes, I read through these narratives and refined coding where appropriate, and I identified recurring codes and themes. This process allowed me to uncover prevailing meanings of citizenship, the extent to which study participants felt a part of the national community, and the factors influencing these meanings and understandings. All respondents were assigned pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.

FINDINGS

The following section examines the meaning of U.S. citizenship for Puerto Ricans and the extent to which they feel accepted into the American national community. In the first part, I show that for Puerto Ricans, the meaning of citizenship falls primarily along two dimensions: formal status and rights. In the second part, I show that despite having U.S. citizenship, Puerto Ricans feel excluded from the national community. Thus, this analysis shows that while Puerto Ricans have political membership (i.e., citizenship status) they lack social membership (i.e., inclusion into the national imaginary).

Meaning of U.S. Citizenship: Formal Status and Rights

The majority of respondents (80 percent) described the meaning of citizenship as formal status, rights, and privileges. Most of those who articulated this meaning of citizenship specified the right to enter the United States, and others also noted the right to work and to access public programs and services. Malia illustrates a common description of the meaning of U.S. citizenship:

I can travel freely to the U.S., I can return to my country [Puerto Rico] whenever I want, I can return to Florida. ... [It means] health care benefits, nutritional benefits ... wow, so many things, education, [English] language, because English is taught in Puerto Rico. ... The benefits are significant in all aspects.

Malia highlights the significance of the right to enter the United States and the freedom to move between the island and the mainland at her will. This was a particularly salient right for her, as she

had arrived in Florida with her husband and four-year-old son just a year prior to our interview. The family's emigration was motivated by her unstable employment in the pharmaceutical industry and her husband's underpaid job as a correctional officer. Given their dire economic circumstances in Puerto Rico, Malia's ability to leave the island with her family and settle in Florida has been critical.

Malia's case illustrates the ways in which colonialism, citizenship, and migration intersect for Puerto Ricans, particularly for those arriving in the contemporary wave. The elimination of federal corporate tax incentives that were established to attract U.S. corporations into the island, including pharmaceuticals, led to the departure of these employers during the 2000s. All the while, century-old maritime laws designed to protect the U.S. shipping industry raised the cost of living in Puerto Rico and dragged down the island's economy. The prolonged effects of the Great Recession further exacerbated deteriorating economic conditions. During this period, the government relied more heavily on borrowing, and by 2015, the island's \$72 billion debt had become insolvent; however, Puerto Rican public entities are excluded from U.S. bankruptcy laws. These compounding economic issues led to the implementation of severe austerity measures that reduced or cut government services, especially affecting public employees. For those enduring the brunt of Puerto Rico's economic crisis, like Malia's family, migration to the mainland is an economic and survival strategy, a strategy that is ironically available by the citizenship that is the source of structural inequalities on the island.⁷

Esmeralda, a 26-year resident of Orlando and social worker at the local school district, offered a similar meaning for U.S. citizenship:

It is the ease of coming here [to the United States]. I can enter and leave whenever I want, I can vote, because in Puerto Rico I can't vote for president, which I think is ridiculous. ... Other [Puerto Ricans] that I work with qualify for public assistance programs, for health, for education, for all of those things without being questioned; all they have to do is complete the application [and] you have the right to those programs. I wouldn't have a right to any of those things if I was not a citizen.

Esmeralda echoed that the right to enter and exit the United States is central to the meaning of U.S. citizenship. And like Malia, Esmeralda draws attention to the right to social programs, including

public health care coverage, nutrition assistance, and education benefits (i.e., federal financial aid) that she and other Puerto Ricans have in Puerto Rico and in the United States. In emphasizing that their status as citizens grants them the right to apply for these programs without question, Esmeralda makes an implicit comparison to the experiences of noncitizens who may have to go through a lengthier review process and who may not qualify for benefits. Another important right that Esmeralda identifies as a Puerto Rican residing stateside is the right to vote for president, which highlights the inferior U.S. citizenship in Puerto Rico.

Fabiola, a recent arrival from Puerto Rico who works as a school cafeteria monitor, offered the following meaning of U.S. citizenship:

I think [it] only [means] the opportunity to enter and exit the country without fear of being detained, being able to have the same opportunities other Americans have, perhaps the opportunity to get a good education, a good job ... but we still have to work hard, it's not like you arrive in this country and because you are an American citizen you are equal to the rest, you also endure a lot of discrimination. ... We should have [the same rights], I don't think we have them. ... I think the key is having to work hard, and get educated, it's not like you're a citizen and [because of that] you're going to have privileges. I don't feel American. I am Puerto Rican [the] same as any Latino immigrant.

The right to enter and exit the United States also features prominently in Fabiola's interpretation of U.S. citizenship, especially because this status allows her to be present "without fear," reflecting an understanding of her formal status and rights vis-à-vis the position of undocumented immigrants. She also notes that citizenship to her means having access to the same opportunities that are available to Americans; however, she recognizes that in practice, citizenship status does not make her equal to other Americans. Fabiola tellingly reveals she does not feel American but rather she is "Puerto Rican [the] same as any Latino immigrant," a critical sentiment because it suggests Puerto Ricans perceive their position in the United States as comparable to that of Latin American immigrants despite their status as citizens.

Some respondents noted that U.S. citizenship initially lacked significance but that it became

meaningful once they learned about the experiences of Latin American immigrants. Jacqueline, a three-year resident of Orlando who left Puerto Rico with her family due to the rising costs of private education and crime, shared,

I didn't know the value of being a citizen of the United States because [when] I lived in Puerto Rico I could enter, leave, I would go everywhere. When I arrived here [in Orlando] and I realized my friends from work didn't have citizenship, they can be deported at any moment, they have to study to become citizens, they get married to obtain citizenship, it really saddened me that I didn't value my citizenship. For me citizenship is now something sacred, and I thank the Lord that I was born in Puerto Rico and that I am Puerto Rican.

Similar to Jacqueline, other respondents described not fully understanding the significance of U.S. citizenship while they lived in Puerto Rico. In Jacqueline's case, the meaning of U.S. citizenship was less clear to her while she was living on the island, perhaps because she was less exposed to the issues encountered by those with noncitizen statuses. Once she moved to Orlando, she learned about the challenges that immigrants who lack legal status endure while also experiencing the rights and privileges accorded by her status as a citizen. Through relationships with Latin American immigrants she learned about the potential of being deported, the challenges encountered when seeking legalization, and the (direct and indirect) pathways for becoming a naturalized citizen. Becoming aware of these experiences not only makes Jacqueline sympathetic to immigrants but also makes the legal dimensions of U.S. citizenship more salient.

Citizenship without Membership

Nearly all study participants (92 percent) expressed that despite having U.S. citizenship, Puerto Ricans are not accepted as full Americans. Respondents provided multiple explanations for their exclusion, which are captured by three interrelated themes: (1) Puerto Rico's colonial political status, (2) perceptions of Puerto Ricans as foreign, and (3) Puerto Ricans'/Latinos' racial incompatibility with "American."

Puerto Rico's Colonial Political Status. Among study participants who feel that Puerto Ricans are not accepted as members of the American community, more than 40 percent reported that Puerto Ricans

are excluded due to the island's political status. Most of these respondents (6 out of 10) noted Americans lack an understanding of Puerto Rico's political relationship to the United States and, as such, of Puerto Ricans' status as U.S. citizens. For instance, Yolanda, a 16-year resident of Orlando who was born/raised in Puerto Rico, shared,

Many of them do not even know Puerto Ricans are American citizens. ... What we have to do is educate them, how I had to do with my boss at Walmart. Once I found the information about the law [Jones Act] in English, I printed the information and I took it to him and I told him, "Look, since you asked me the other day, well I felt the need to bring you the law that states I am a U.S. citizen; here it is." He just looked at me without knowing what to say. ... We have to launch an educational campaign to instruct the North American why we are American citizens.

Yolanda is referring to an instance in which her manager at a Walmart questioned why she did not have a green card—a resident alien card issued by the U.S. government that verifies authorized and permanent resident status. Yolanda recalled feeling surprised by the question and was not sure how to respond because she had never had to justify her status as a citizen. Although she informed him, "I am an American citizen just like you," she felt compelled to search for the law that granted Puerto Ricans citizenship to prove her status to her supervisor and to prepare for future inquiries about her legal status in Florida.

Kelvin, a New York born/raised Puerto Rican and local teacher, similarly reported,

No. They don't see them [as full Americans] here. ... I mean this is still Southern parts, so you hear and understand that for Americans in Florida [they ask], "Puerto Ricans, who are these people?" or "Why should they be here?" Even some [of my] colleagues at the [high] school [say], "You know I hope this trend doesn't continue." We've had the highest turn[over] in terms of teachers quitting. ... Thirty-eight teachers quit this year, veteran teachers, [because] they don't want to deal with the [Puerto Rican student] population.

Yolanda's and Kelvin's accounts draw attention to important contextual dynamics that shape how U.S. citizenship is experienced. First, Orlando is located between "Latin" South Florida and "Southern"

(White/Black) North Florida (Silver 2013); that is, geographically Orlando is between regions that are characterized by distinct ethnoracial groups and race relations. Second, Orlando is a relatively new destination of migration that has attracted not only Puerto Ricans but also a significant number of South American migrants; consequently, the region is in the midst of demographic transitions, and Latinos are leading these changes. Just as noteworthy, both respondents' experiences capture a lacking awareness among important institutional agents of Puerto Ricans' legal position in the United States—an experience echoed by other respondents who in their capacities as nonprofit directors, public employees, and professionals also encountered local resistance to the growing Puerto Rican population.

While the majority of respondents pointed to a lack of knowledge among Americans of Puerto Rico's relationship with the United States as the source of Puerto Ricans' exclusion from the American community, others (four out of ten) noted that it is the island's colonial status that influences the perception of Puerto Ricans' un-Americanism. For example, Ángel, a 20-year resident of Orlando and local engineer, explained,

Well, it depends on who you ask. I think it depends on their intellect. Yes, legally we are [Americans], legally, but for some people, they perceive it as, "They are not even a state, they are a territory, they can't even vote in elections, so they are not [full Americans]."

According to Ángel, some do not see Puerto Ricans as full Americans because Puerto Rico is not completely incorporated into the U.S. territorial community. This perception is further reinforced by limited citizen rights on the island, which to some Americans conveys that Puerto Ricans are lower-status citizens. This perception demonstrates historical legislative and judiciary decisions that defined the incorporation of the island critically shape contemporary understandings of Puerto Ricans' place in the American national imaginary. Ángel elaborates that for those who understand the political relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States, they see Puerto Rico as dependent and as a burden, a view according to Ángel that was heightened in that moment amid the island's \$72 billion debt crisis and Puerto Rico's efforts to obtain federal bankruptcy protections.

Perceptions of Foreignness. Of respondents, 66 percent expressed that Puerto Ricans are not accepted

as full Americans because they are perceived as foreign. Of these respondents, the majority (six out of ten) specified Puerto Ricans are perceived as immigrants, while a smaller share (four out of ten) noted perceptions of Puerto Ricans' foreignness are related to cultural factors.

Julian, a New York-born/raised Puerto Rican who moved to Orlando in the 1990s, shared,

I think there are still some groups that don't even realize that [Puerto Ricans] are U.S. citizens. ... When I first started coming to Florida ... some of the White people would yell, "I'm going to call immigration to reverse your green card!" [and] I was like, "I don't have a green card, idiot; what are you talk[ing about]?" ... And you saw [it] with the nomination of [Sonia] Sotomayor where conservative republicans and other ethnic and racial groups in Florida [would] say, "How could she be [nominated] if she's not even a U.S. citizen? Her parents are immigrants, she's an immigrant!" ... It's not as bad as it used to be, but [it] truly still is [an issue]. Puerto Ricans in a lot of parts of the South and still in a few parts in Florida are truly viewed as migrants that sailed over from Puerto Rico.

Julian's various experiences are significant because they capture notions of foreigner, illegality, and deportability that have framed Puerto Ricans in Orlando throughout the past three decades. When he arrived in Florida he encountered situations in which Whites perceived him as a deportable immigrant. During our conversation, he also recalled his work as a political consultant through which he encountered instances in which staff for the Florida State Legislature remarked, "We should just revoke [Puerto Ricans'] immigration status!" While Julian acknowledges an improvement over the years, there are moments in which perceptions of Puerto Ricans' status as foreigners resurface, such as the nomination of Justice Sonia Sotomayor for the U.S. Supreme Court in 2009. Although she is Puerto Rican and was born/raised in New York, there was strong local opposition on the basis of her "noncitizen" status and "immigrant" background. Julian also draws attention to a regional perception that Puerto Ricans are seeking entrance into Florida similarly to other immigrants (e.g., Cubans, Dominicans, and Haitians)—a perception that subsumes Puerto Ricans under racialized constructions of Caribbean immigrants despite Puerto Ricans' status as citizens.

When I asked Janelys whether Puerto Ricans are accepted as full Americans, she responded,

No, definitely not. We are Latinos just like any other [Latino]. ... You see it today with what is happening: everyone is Mexican, we are all the same. And for me we are all the same. I don't feel that being Puerto Rican makes me different from a Mexican, a Colombian. ... For me we are all Latinos, and I don't see a difference. ... I think Americans don't see that I am Puerto Rican or that I am an American. ... For them Latino is Latino. It doesn't matter. And the treatment towards a Latino will be the same regardless of whether s/he is Puerto Rican or not.

Janelys expresses that Puerto Ricans' place outside of the American imaginary is shaped by Latinos' position in the United States as perpetual foreigners. As she points out, the perception that Latino is synonymous with immigrant is connected to the conflation of Latino and Mexican; as a result, stereotypical representations of Mexicans as undocumented immigrants spill over onto Latinos regardless of their national origin, legal status, or generation (Johnson 1997; Lippard 2011). A devalued citizenship has also characterized Puerto Ricans in other mainland communities. Ramos-Zayas (2004) argues that Chicago Puerto Ricans experienced a *delinquent citizenship*—a form of belonging that approaches a similar condition of “illegality” and marginalization of undocumented immigrants. In Chicago, Puerto Ricans' racialization as criminal and as outside of the American imaginary was rooted in their nationalistic politics and anticolonial activism; however, I find that in Orlando, their perceived deviance and inferior citizen status is tied to perceptions of them as unwelcomed foreigners whose presence can be disciplined via the immigration system. Indeed, Orlando Puerto Ricans' contemporary citizenship experiences are being shaped by the broader context of immigration—the large-scale influx of Latin American and Caribbean immigrants in the post-1965 period, their settlement and growth in new destinations in the South, and the broader criminalization of immigrants.

Other respondents reported that perceptions of Puerto Ricans' foreignness are also based on cultural factors, primarily their Spanish-language background. Victoria, a 21-year resident of the region, reported Americans do not accept Puerto Ricans because “they still consider them, because

of language and culture, Hispanic. Americans are people from the U.S.; they're not Hispanics in any way, shape, or form. I think that's the distinction.” Malia offered a similar understanding: “No, [Puerto Ricans] are not accepted. They are not accepted, mainly because of the language. Although we are citizens, we mostly speak Spanish, and because of that we are treated like any other Hispanic.” Both respondents understand Puerto Ricans are excluded from the American community because they are a Spanish-speaking group, which defines them as “Hispanic” in the eyes of others. Victoria emphasizes that in practice, “American” and “Hispanic” are mutually exclusive groups: Hispanic is proxy for foreigner while American is understood as U.S.-native, and Hispanics are culturally different and incompatible. Malia adds these perceptions are consequential as Puerto Ricans are also subjected to the differential treatment other Hispanics endure. Indeed, these perceptions are informed by instances in which Whites interjected “English only!” or “You're in America; speak English!” when respondents spoke Spanish in public. These narratives show that despite being U.S. citizens, Puerto Ricans are affected by a racialized nativism that targets Latina/os—an ideology that constructs Latinos not only as foreigners but also as a demographic and cultural threat to the “American nation” (Sanchez 1997; Huber et al. 2008; Lippard 2011). This ideology was particularly salient during the political climate of the time when then-candidate Donald Trump made anti-Mexican/anti-Latino rhetoric a cornerstone of his campaign.

While DeGenova and Ramos-Zayas (2003) found that in Chicago the “politics of citizenship” produced differentiation and, as a result, cleavages between citizen Puerto Ricans and undocumented Mexicans, I find that in Orlando, a nativist social and political context absorbs Mexicans, South Americans, and Puerto Ricans, as in the eyes of others these groups do not conform to notions of Americanness. Aranda (2007) found comparable experiences among middle-class Puerto Ricans in the Northeast. Their ethnoracial marginalization—that is, the stigmatization of Spanish language and of their culture coupled with discriminatory experiences—contributed to feelings of (dis)belonging on the mainland, which led some to resettle in Puerto Rico. Although Orlando Puerto Ricans also don't feel accepted as Americans, the overwhelming majority of respondents planned on permanently settling in Florida as dire economic and social conditions in Puerto Rico made return migration improbable.

Racial Incompatibility. More than a third of study participants (37 percent) reported that Puerto Ricans are not perceived as full Americans due to their racial incompatibility. Most of these respondents specified Puerto Ricans' non-White status (six out of ten), and others (four out of ten) described becoming part of a racialized Latino group. For instance, Matías, a 26-year resident of Orlando, explained Puerto Ricans are not accepted as full American:

Matías: I understand there is still a distinction between who is an American in the way that most people from the United States use the term *American*. I understand that there is still a large proportion for whom being American means having decedents who arrived on the *Mayflower*.

AJV: And Puerto Ricans don't fit that meaning?

Matías: No. As a matter of fact, using the terms *African American* and *Native American* to distinguish between [them] [and] those who arrived with blond hair and light eyes ... the fact that a distinction exists tells me there is still a difference today.

Matías draws attention to the racialized meaning of American. He alludes to the significance of physical features (blond hair and light colored eyes), and he points to generational and ancestral dimensions (arriving on the *Mayflower*). In other words, he understands belonging in the United States is not just premised on physical characteristics but is defined by having ancestral ties to European settlers. This perception of belonging is further reinforced by what he interprets as the incomplete inclusion of Native Americans and African Americans, groups that are referred to as qualified Americans despite their historic presence in the United States. Interesting to note, Matías can phenotypically pass for White, and an argument could be made about his own European ancestry given Puerto Rico's 400-year colonization by Spain, yet Matías believes he does not meet the criteria of American. Drawing on Flores-González (2017) elucidates how Matías understands his and Puerto Ricans' location in the American imaginary. Flores-González argues that an ethnoracial ideal—racial (White) and cultural (Anglo-Saxon-Protestant heritage) characteristics—is the most salient component of an American identity. Because Latinos are ethnoracially incompatible with conceptions of American, they are excluded from the nation despite their U.S. citizenship or adherence to American values.

Esperanza, a recent arrival from Puerto Rico, expressed a similar point of view regarding Puerto Ricans' place outside of the national community: "White Americans from here [the United States] ... they are very specific about their race. They think that Puerto Ricans are not worth it."

And Mariaelisa, also a recent arrival in Florida, noted, "I don't think [Puerto Ricans are accepted as Americans] ... because even though Americans say they don't discriminate, deep inside they feel superior. Americans feel superior and they see us as if we were still Indians in canoes over there [in Puerto Rico]." Esperanza and Mariaelisa understand American means White; however, they add the boundaries of Americanness are also impenetrable for Puerto Ricans because they are stigmatized as a lower-status group. Mariaelisa highlights that despite egalitarian ideals that characterize the United States, she believes Whites continue to hold historic views of Puerto Ricans as a "primitive" and "backward people." Duany (2002) demonstrates these racialized perceptions were significant for legitimizing the colonial project and maintaining Puerto Rico at the periphery during the early twentieth century, and as respondents indicate, these perceptions transcend time and continue to exclude Puerto Ricans a century later.

Malcom, an island Puerto Rican who has lived in Orlando for a handful of years, explained that although Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens, they are not granted membership: "Because of racism. They [Americans] see us as inferior. Why? Because we are American citizens by imposition, we are Latin Americans, and we are Caribbean, and we are Afro-Caribbean, we are Afro-Antillean, we are different. We are not North Americans, we are not Caucasian. ... we are different." Malcom articulates that Puerto Ricans are excluded from the American nation due to *ethnoracism*—an ideology that defines individuals as inferior on the basis of geopolitical, cultural, and racial factors (Aranda and Rebollo-Gil 2004; Aranda 2007). Respondents understand that Puerto Ricans occupy an outsider status in the American imaginary due to the colonial project that made Puerto Ricans into U.S. subjects rather than equal members (Grosfoguel 2003). Because a Puerto Rican identity embodies this colonial history, being Puerto Rican itself racializes an individual as an inferior "other" in the United States (Grosfoguel and Georas 2000; Aranda 2007). By drawing attention to the geographic location of Puerto Rico, Malcom also points to what Grosfoguel and Georas (2000) call global coloniality, that is, the current location a country/

region occupies within a global hierarchy that is rooted in European colonization. The lower status of Latin American and Caribbean nations (previously colonized non-European societies) relative to the United States (a White-settler imperial state) also contributes to Puerto Ricans' social exclusion. Last, Malcom addresses the significance of race for defining belonging in the United States. In the case of Puerto Ricans, their mixed African, Indigenous, and Spanish background is incompatible with racial and cultural conceptions of American.

Malcom's perspective resonates with Sebastián's, who understands that Puerto Ricans are not accepted for the following reasons:

I think that they [Americans] see us low on the ladder. ... They don't see [Puerto Ricans] the same as them. Our language is different, we are invading their territory; at the end of the day, Puerto Ricans are part of that group they call Latinos, which will eventually make decisions over them [Americans]. While their population is declining the Latino population keeps growing.

Sebastián describes how Puerto Ricans have undergone a racialization process that has sorted Puerto Ricans to the lower rungs of the social hierarchy (Grosfoguel and Georas 2000). Sebastián also draws attention to important state and national demographic trends that contribute to the perception of Puerto Ricans as a threat. In Florida, Puerto Ricans and Puerto Rican spaces and culture have become more visible due to the population's significant growth (300 percent) during the past three decades (U.S. Census Bureau 1980, 2016); in fact, the state has consistently ranked in the top destination for Puerto Ricans leaving the island since 2005 (Velázquez Estrada 2017). Moreover, in the United States, Puerto Ricans are included in the Latino group—another group whose projected growth is expected to alter the social, cultural, and political order.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study draws on 98 in-depth interviews to examine the meaning of and experiences with U.S. citizenship of Puerto Ricans. I find Puerto Ricans in Florida express aspects of the liberal model of citizenship, yet they also show that legacies of empire and racialization mitigate egalitarian and universal citizenship and membership frameworks. The meaning of U.S. citizenship that respondents

articulate reflects the centrality of citizenship as political: specifically, the significance of territorially bounded exclusive political communities, citizenship as formal status, and exclusive rights granted by formal political membership (Walzer 1983; Brubaker 1989; Bosniak 2000; Bloemraad et al. 2008). The ability to enter the mainland, live and work stateside, and access social programs is critical for respondents—a perception that is further informed by recognizing their more privileged legal position in relation to that of Latin American immigrants. Therefore, two dimensions (formal status and rights) of modern citizenship are the most salient for Florida Puerto Ricans.

However, legacies of empire produce important incongruencies in Puerto Ricans' U.S. citizenship. First, legacies of empire have created a group with differentiated citizen statuses (a fragile statutory citizenship for the island born and a more permanent constitutional citizenship for the mainland born) and differentiated citizen rights (inferior rights on the island and full citizen rights stateside). Second, legacies of empire coupled with racialization are sources of Puerto Ricans' exclusion from the American imaginary. Florida Puerto Ricans experience invisibility as members of the American nation due to the island's colonial status. In most cases, Americans are unaware that Puerto Rico is a territory of the United States and that by extension Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens. Among those who are familiar with the colonial relationship, they interpret it as indicative of Puerto Ricans' marginal position in the American community. Thus, the colonial relationship renders Puerto Ricans invisible and inferior.

Paradoxically, Puerto Ricans in Florida are simultaneously hypervisible as "foreign" and "unrightfully" present. This hypervisibility stems from being subsumed into the Latino group and the broader racialization of Latino with foreigner, undocumented, and removable regardless of national origin, legal status, or generation (Young 2000; Oboler 2006; Rocco 2014). In addition, Puerto Ricans' Latino background (Spanish language, culture, and racial distinctiveness) makes them incompatible with the ethnoracial ideal of an American as White and of Anglo-Saxon European descent. Puerto Ricans experience membership boundaries comparably to other U.S.-born Latinos who also feel excluded from the American imaginary (Flores-González 2017). These experiences are telling because they demonstrate that conceptions of belonging and membership in the United States remain connected to the racial hierarchy (Masuoka and Junn 2013).

Thus, this study captures an important dissonance between citizenship as political membership (i.e., citizen status) and citizenship as social membership (i.e., member of the American nation). I argue that Puerto Ricans' understandings of and contemporary experiences with U.S. citizenship stem from (1) the state's marking Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans as different and inferior and (2) racialization processes that construct Latinos as foreign and as a racial other. In agreement with Smith (2017) and Barreto and Lozano (2017), I contend that U.S. citizenship is not a politically and socially uniform category; rather, U.S. citizenship is *internally stratified*. As part of this stratified system, and building from Grosfoguel and Georas (2000), I advance that Puerto Ricans have a *colonial/racialized citizenship*. This concept emphasizes the structurally produced marginalization of Puerto Ricans, which is illustrated in an unequal citizen status, differentiated citizen rights, and exclusion from the American imaginary. Indeed, a colonial/racialized citizenship demonstrates how legacies of empire and racialization work together to mark individuals through time, geographic spaces, and generations. However, this concept also acknowledges the agency allowed by this status. As colonial/racialized citizens, Puerto Ricans have unrestricted access to and freedom of mobility throughout the territorial community, full citizen rights stateside, and access to institutions that facilitate incorporation in Florida.

Shedding light on the internally stratified structure of U.S. citizenship is important for multiple reasons. First, a system of stratified citizenships sustains a political, economic, and social system founded on and for the advancement of White supremacy. Second, by deeply examining the institution of U.S. citizenship, we can pull back the veil of egalitarianism and uniformity, allowing us to better understand how citizenship creates inequalities between not only those who have citizenship and those who do not (Bosniak 2006; Menjívar 2006) but also among citizen populations, as U.S. citizenship itself creates classes of formal citizens who possess differentiated rights, abilities to enjoy rights, and varying degrees of social inclusion. Third, the conceptual lens offered by this study is also timely. A colonial/racialized citizenship explains the federal government's slow response to Hurricane María and the extent of the structural damage caused by the storm in Puerto Rico. Given conditions on the island, Central Florida has become an important recovery site as thousands of Puerto Ricans have arrived seeking temporary relief from the devastation while others plan to settle permanently. Many of these arrivals will need

institutional support as they transition into Florida and resources to recover and rebuild their lives on the mainland. This research provides insight into how Hurricane María evacuees may be perceived and treated as they enter a social landscape in which Puerto Ricans are already less than equal counterparts. The contestations about space and territory, rightful belonging, and the contours of the American nation documented in this research may become amplified as more Puerto Ricans make Central Florida their home.

Although at a social level a colonial/racialized citizenship excludes Puerto Ricans from the American imaginary, Puerto Ricans in Florida can draw on this status to enact full citizenship. Specifically, with 29 electoral votes, Florida is the largest swing state in the nation; further, the margin of victory in the state has been narrow (ranging from 73,000 to 205,000 votes) in the last three presidential elections. With more than 1 million Puerto Ricans residing in Florida who have now been joined by thousands more who have fled the aftermath of Hurricane María, Florida Puerto Ricans have an opportunity to translate their demographic magnitude into political influence by way of their full citizenship rights stateside. Indeed, elite political actors have taken notice of Puerto Rican voters in Florida; liberal and conservative donors have already poured hundreds of thousands of dollars into the state to mobilize this specific electorate.⁸ Thus, a colonial/racialized citizenship can be activated into a meaningful citizenship by participating in the electoral process on the mainland. If Puerto Ricans manage to swing Florida in a national election and/or alter the state's political power structure, they will become political actors with increased political leverage and negotiating power.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my profound gratitude to study participants for making this research possible. I thank Vilma Ortiz, Rubén Hernández-León, César Ayala, The Research Group, and this journal's reviewers for their helpful comments and feedback on earlier versions of this article. This research was sponsored by the generous support of the UCLA Institute of American Cultures and the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center.

NOTES

1. See Bosniak (2000) and Isin and Turner (2002) for a discussion of these citizenship models.
2. See Walzer (1983); Brubaker (1992); Soysal (1994); Kymlicka (1995); Bosniak (2006); Perry (2006);

- Bloemraad, Korteweg, and Yurdakul (2008); Joppke (2010); Enriquez (2013).
3. This article recognizes that the term *American* captures someone who originates from or is a citizen of the Americas (North, Central, and South). However, the use of *American* to convey citizenship or origins in the United States is dominant in citizenship and belonging literatures. As such, this article deploys the term *American* to denote the United States for clarity and consistency purposes.
 4. Guam and the Philippines also were acquired in this treaty and endured similar ambiguities with respect to their territorial status and the type of political membership granted to their inhabitants.
 5. Statutory citizenship is different from constitutional citizenship in that it can be reversed by Congress at any time. On the other hand, constitutional citizenship can be revoked only by amending the U.S. Constitution, a process that would entail a lengthy legislative process at the state and federal levels.
 6. Puerto Ricans have full citizenship rights once they move to the United States; however, those born on the island continue to have a reversible statutory U.S. citizenship even when they reside in the United States.
 7. For a more detailed discussion about how the colonial relationship has affected the Puerto Rican economy and U.S.-bound migrations see Ayala and Bernabe (2007).
 8. See Dixon (2016) and O'Keefe (2018).
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