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## Rewriting Womanhood

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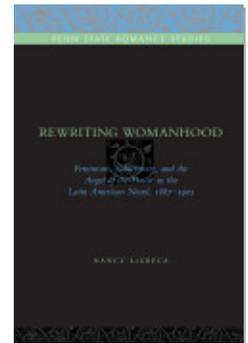
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WOMEN AS BODY IN PUERTO RICO:  
 MEDICINE, MORALITY, AND INSTITUTIONALIZATIONS  
 OF SEXUAL OPPRESSION IN THE LONG  
 NINETEENTH CENTURY

DECADES BEFORE THE WARS of independence erupted across the continent, Puerto Rico had been struggling economically because of scarcity of gold in its mines, attacks by Caribs, sackings from various European pirates and privateers, and trouble starting its sugar industry.<sup>1</sup> Spanish restrictions on trade and the island's need to import many necessities created a perpetual negative trade balance. By the early nineteenth century, years of poor economic conditions were compounded. The loss in 1811 of the *situados*, a tax paid by Mexico that resulted in an important source of income for the island, augmented an economic decline that was already in progress. In an attempt to replace the loss of the *situados*, more money was printed, which led to inflation, causing widespread poverty.

The Cédula de Gracia (Royal Decree of Graces) of 1815, which increased European immigration and provided industry incentives for sugar cultivation, aided the rejuvenation of the sugar industry in the second decade of the nineteenth century. During this time, the United States became a major importer of Caribbean sugar. These changes improved the island's economy and enriched the class of sugar plantation owners. Despite Spain's agreement with Britain in 1817 to terminate the importation of slaves, the labor-intensive sugar industry demanded the import of additional human beings from Africa for unpaid work at midcentury.<sup>2</sup> In 1850 the introduction of

1. For a critical analysis of the problem of authority in the writing of Puerto Rico's history, see González-Quevedo 1996, chap. 1. Salvador Brau's *Historia de Puerto Rico* (1904) (which followed his *Puerto Rico y su historia* in 1892) was the history textbook used for many years in Puerto Rican schools and presents a paternalistic history that views U.S. occupation as a route to material progress (González-Quevedo 1996, 12–13, 23). González-Quevedo identifies Fernando Picó as the historian who first "raises questions" about Brau's view and presents the U.S. invasion as an usurpation of independence and gives significance to the nationalistic gesture of the Grito de Lares (27). González-Quevedo regards Blanca Silvestrini and María Dolores Luques Sánchez's *Historia de Puerto Rico: Trayectoria de un pueblo* (1991) as the first feminist history (16–19).

2. The importation of slaves reached its maximum in Puerto Rico between 1825 and 1835, with between sixty thousand and eighty thousand slaves brought to the island between 1815 and 1845 (Scarano 1993, 405–6).

steam-run mills increased sugar production, but also caused sugar prices to drop, contributing to a future decline in the economic viability of the industry.

When slavery was abolished, the industry could not withstand the absence of free labor; because of abolition and other factors, sugar was replaced by coffee as lead cash crop, starting roughly in the 1870s.<sup>3</sup> The Puerto Rican medical doctor, writer, and politician Manuel Zeno Gandía's novel *La charca* (1894) is a realistic portrait of the socioeconomic condition of the Puerto Rican highlands and is set during these years. The characters in the novel depend on coffee production for their livelihood and, paralleling the historical reality (Scarano 1993, 468), Zeno Gandía tells the story of the exploitation of small farmers by large landowners who manipulated their less technologically advanced neighbors into incurring large amounts of debt. Only a class of small- and medium-sized growers was able to resist the quasi-feudal takeover by large plantations.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the wealth that landowners accumulated during the coffee boom, the Puerto Rican peasants (*jibaros*) lived in miserable poverty. They suffered from common illnesses, epidemics (malaria, yellow fever, and tuberculosis, among others), nutritional deficiencies, and lack of education. The prevalence of illness was precipitated by poor housing near swamps or other wet areas, as well as lack of medical care and hygiene education. Alcoholism, gambling, and promiscuity were ways to cope with the hardships. Women of this class were in a particularly difficult situation because they were responsible for child rearing and domestic chores and participated in agricultural labor yet did not directly receive their own pay; a male family member received a female relative's wages, which the men commonly spent on alcohol or gambling (Scarano 1993, 474). *La charca*, in which these problems are vividly depicted, evidences the intellectual elite's concern over these social problems and their effects on the future of an independent Puerto Rico.

Politically the 1800s were characterized by tension over the future of the island's governance and its contemporary need for reforms. Conservatives

3. While sugar was the main cash crop from roughly 1820 to 1876, coffee replaced it from 1876 to 1898 (Scarano 1993, 461).

4. These, along with small tobacco growers and cigar makers, cattle ranchers, and fishermen, made up a middle class. People of the middle classes also worked in administrative positions, commerce, shipping, and skilled services. The lowest on the social ladder worked as farm laborers and domestic servants.

(mostly Spaniards who were government officials or wealthy landowners and merchants) were staunchly faithful to the Spanish Crown, while liberals (mostly educated men of the middle class) were divided on how much autonomy the island should have and the nature and degree of reform. From a political perspective, a cause for the poor social conditions had to be found and corrected. The historian Ribes Tovar re-creates here the views of nineteenth-century liberal intellectuals who blamed Puerto Rico's problems on the moral weakness of the island's inhabitants: "Civic irresponsibility, the enervating action of the tropical climate, ignorance, indolence, vagrancy, rampant sexuality, ignorance of physical culture and the whole tone of community life on the island, which emphasized sensitivity and sensuousness at the expense of the intellect [were the causes of poverty and disease]" (1972, 85). This general idea of social illness, frequently related in discourse of the times with physical illness, was at the base of policies that attempted to correct women's contributions to Puerto Rico's problems. In this passage there is an implied dichotomy between healthy, masculine traits (the intellect, knowledge, abstraction, responsibility) versus traits that were historically attributed to femininity (ignorance, sensitivity, sensuousness, irresponsibility). As the nineteenth-century Latin American literary and cultural studies scholar Benigno Trigo has found, for liberal intellectuals, the metaphor for the literal and figurative diseases that plagued the country was the infirm female body that would give birth to a nation of enervated leaders. To cure this diseased nation, a segment of the intellectual elite focused on miscegenation, concubinage, and vagrancy in the lower classes, while bourgeois women and elite women were targeted for improving their motherhood skills and eliminating vanity (which was associated with flirtatiousness). The Catholic Church's policies to mitigate sexual promiscuity supported the goals of the liberals, despite the fact that the church's impetus was moral reform in a religious sense rather than social reform with an eye to the future of a "healthy" independent nation.

Power struggles between liberals and conservatives created a tense political climate. For almost three and a half centuries, Puerto Ricans did not have any say in choosing their local leaders, as all were appointed from Spain. The 1868 Grito de Lares (Outcry of Lares, named for the town where it originated) was a significant moment in history because it was an organized, albeit unsuccessful, insurrection against Spanish rule. The leader in the movement for Puerto Rican independence Mariana Bracetti (aka Brazo de Oro [Golden Arm]) had a central organizing role in the rebellion, and the respected Puerto Rican poet and independence activist Lola Rodríguez

de Tió was sympathetic to the cause.<sup>5</sup> In 1870, the first liberal political party was born: the Liberal Reformista (Liberal Reformist Party). As a reaction to this, the conservatives began the Partido Incondicional Español (Spanish Unconditional Party), composed of wealthy royalist Spanish landowners, officials, and merchants who controlled economic and political affairs on the island. With the formation of these two factions, political struggle intensified and liberals and conservatives were more polarized.

The late 1880s was a time of intense economic decline on the island and much anti-Spanish sentiment. In 1887 the Puerto Rican Autonomist Party formed in support of greater Puerto Rican representation in voting and decision making, a decentralized colonial government, and less restrictive trade policies with Spain. The founding members were liberals from the upper and middle bourgeoisie who hoped to also draw smaller businesspeople and artisans to the movement.

The creation of the Autonomist Party occurred at approximately the same time that some bourgeois liberals began organizing boycotts against Spanish interests on the island. To crush the boycotts, the Spanish governor Romualdo Palacio began the *componetes*, a term that refers to “corrective” torture sessions and a period of persecution against suspected organizers of boycotts of Spanish interests. Founding members of the Autonomist Party, known as *patriots*, were tortured and persecuted for confessions and information. During this time, many patriots were exiled to New York, where women saw the greater agency and freedom of female U.S. citizens (Ribes Tovar 1972, 181).

After years of wavering commitment to allowing Puerto Rico greater self-rule, nationals earned some degree of self-government. In 1886 there was a vote for Puerto Rican representatives in the Spanish Congress and in 1897 Spain approved the Autonomic Charter, in which it conceded political and administrative autonomy to the island. This success was halted in 1898 when the United States invaded and took official possession of Puerto Rico, judging that it was unprepared for any significant self-rule.

5. Bracetti was imprisoned for her participation in the Grito de Lares. Rodríguez de Tió (Puerto Rico, 1824–Cuba, 1924), a distinguished national poet; author of Puerto Rico’s national anthem, “La Borinqueña”; and fervent pro-independence activist, was twice exiled from Puerto Rico (to Venezuela in 1877 and to Cuba in 1889) for her patriotic verses and for speaking out in defense of pro-independence political prisoners. In 1892 she was exiled from Cuba for independence activism and moved to New York, where she worked with the Cuban poet and revolutionary José Martí and a group of writers and intellectuals to actualize Cuban and Puerto Rican independence. When the United States took Puerto Rico she left New York in 1902 for Cuba, which was then freed from Spanish rule, and lived there until she died. Her husband was the journalist and independence activist Bonicio Tió y Segarra.

In the generalized Western move toward modernization, liberal reforms in public health and education were planned to take place in Puerto Rico regardless of whether the island was under Spanish or U.S. control. Toward the end of the nineteenth century before the U.S. takeover, liberals succeeded in obtaining support for education from the Spanish Republic. The women of the island “sought to benefit from [liberal reforms], but the conservatives tried to keep them in a state of subjugation. In the press they carried on a subtle campaign against rights for women with poems extolling their beauty, the nobility of their life in the home, and on other topics” (Ribes Tovar 1972, 181). The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a time when early feminists such as Rodríguez de Tió, Roqué, and the Puerto Rican feminist anarchist and workers’ rights activist Luisa Capetillo began to voice their critiques of women’s situation and demand reform. However, conservative women’s magazines (generally directed by men) that concentrated almost exclusively on fashion, religion, domesticity, and feminine virtue were very popular throughout Spanish America as ways of maintaining a conservative model for women, as was the cult to the Virgin Mary, which was the epitome of the self-sacrificing standard of the Angel of the House.

When the United States took control of the territory in 1898, women were anxious to continue the development of education started in the nineteenth century and, under U.S. influence, looked toward gaining more rights (Ribes Tovar 1972, 185). The United States improved infrastructure, education, and scientific research centers, with particular emphasis on the control of epidemics and teaching proper hygiene for disease prevention (186). This is the context in which Roqué writes as she dreams up a fictional doctor who, in medical terminology, defends a woman’s right to sexual pleasure as a physiological necessity, a few years before her compatriot Luisa Capetillo writes a treatise that advocates free love for women and promotes dissoluble marriages. It is useful to look at a trajectory of the changing attitudes of the ruling classes toward women’s bodies and sexuality in order to understand the context from which these early feminist declarations arose.

### Church and Governmental Controls over the Female Body in Puerto Rico from the Eighteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries

While the previous historical chapters of this study (Chapters 1 and 3) revealed that women’s participation in the wars of independence marked a relatively clear transition from a period of agency to women’s strictly and

conservatively defined roles in the early republics, in Puerto Rico we cannot speak of such a clear-cut marker for transition. An examination of changes in certain social customs in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, renders visible an ever-growing awareness of and control over women's bodies over time.

In the eighteenth century the church pinpointed five areas of sexual behavior for correction among parishioners: promiscuity, incest, extramarital sex, prostitution, and abortion.<sup>6</sup> To correct these moral offenses, clergy supported limitations on social activities at which members of the opposite sex met. These limitations were likely leveled at people of the working classes, as elite and bourgeois women were more apt to have a select group of men from their social class from which to choose (or from which their parents chose) for marriage and were monitored and chaperoned very closely. There were likely many political reasons for limiting working-class extramarital relationships in addition to the religious motivation of minimizing so-called sins of the flesh. Controlling female reproductive bodies in late colonial Spanish America was a tool the ruling classes used to attempt to prevent miscegenation, to maintain wealth within racial groups and social classes, and to ensure a "healthy" population of virile citizens with a father/husband as the undisputed head of the family. During this period, women were the focus of limitations on sexual behavior because they were held responsible for permitting or prohibiting men from seducing and impregnating them (Barceló Miller 1987, 70).

The concern over what the church saw as immorally overt sexuality was reflected in its critiques of women's clothing. Ribes Tovar has found that in the eighteenth century, Puerto Rican *criollas* dressed in lighter attire than did European women because of the hot, humid climate. Women's dresses in Puerto Rico exhibited lower necklines and less voluminous and shorter skirts than those of European women. This lighter apparel caused San Juan's bishop in 1712 to accuse *criollas* of dressing provocatively to "induce lustfulness in men" (Ribes Tovar 1972, 65). This critique highlights the belief that women's bodies were the site of control over promiscuity. The physical and visual restraint of female bodies through clothing became one way the church attempted to stifle sexual activity occurring outside of the church- and state-sanctioned bond of marriage.

6. In 1526 Spain authorized, and the Catholic Church approved, the first house of prostitution in America (Flores Ramos 1998, 84). This is an early example of the way that the church condemned prostitution as an immoral activity, while at the same time it had a hand in controlling it (and perpetuating it) rather than fighting solely for its abolition.

Apparently the church's admonishments against low necklines yielded some success, because in the nineteenth century women's attire became more conservative. French influence brought "high-necked dresses, buttoned down the front, with pleats at the bust and lace collar and cuffs," better suited to a European climate than to the tropics (Ribes Tovar 1972, 99). In addition to this ample costume, women wore black shawls when going out in public (99). Hegemonic social policy succeeded in repressing the sexuality that apparently flowed too easily through Puerto Rican women's lighter garments.

The moral reforms that religious officials prescribed to control and limit the amorous meetings of young people were broad. They enacted restrictions for society as a whole, as well as particular limitations for women. In an obsessive effort to minimize contact between young unmarried people, the church disallowed festivals and other activities. For example, in 1729 a church mandate prohibited religious celebrations held at night in honor of the saints where young men and women could meet and enact "great offenses against God" (Pizarro cited in Barceló Miller 1987, 68; my translation). In 1760 *fandangos* (dances where young people socialized) were eliminated because they turned into a night of "profane diversions," and in 1787 the custom of singing the rosary was forbidden for the same reason (Barceló Miller 1987, 69–70). Religious officials hoped that by controlling social customs and public spaces they could also control the private sexual lives of its parishioners. The idea of controlling private aspects of citizens' lives overflowed into other areas.

The first cries for independence in the early nineteenth century and the subsequent successful battles waged by the Venezuelan independence leader Simón Bolívar and his followers led to stricter Spanish social and military control of the territories that were still governed by the Crown. Heightened control included limiting circumstances that could lead to social unrest and violence.

Like women's dress and social gatherings, dance took on a more conservative tone in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Back in the eighteenth century, *criollos* had transformed conservative traditional Spanish dances to fit the "Antillean environment": "the body was used to interpret intimate fantasies which expressed profound inner impulses" (Ribes Tovar 1972, 73). That is, dances became more sensual and closer to embodying sexual urges. By 1832, however, the sensual aspect of dance was curtailed. The dance of preference at the time was the Sevillian-style *contradanza*, whose final step was deemed too provocative: "[after changing partners]

the original couple briefly reunited in a symbolical amorous embrace” (98). This last step “resulted in too many duels” and was thus eliminated (98). Although it is not clear from the historian’s account who made the proclamation banning the dance, the important point is that the act reflects a conservative tendency in Puerto Rico, similar to those in the United States and Europe, aimed at repressing overt shows of sexuality in the national dances. Dances of the lower classes and those associated most with Afro–Puerto Ricans (such as the *danza*), however, remained erotic and were taboo for members of the so-called respectable classes.<sup>7</sup>

Cultural conservatism increased in Puerto Rican society as the century wore on, partially in conjunction with the intensification of Spanish efforts to squelch pro-independence activities. Although the aim was to limit opportunities for violence and prevent insurgencies, some of the Spanish decrees directly enforced the subordination of women by men through the physical control of their bodies. For example, General de la Torre, the highest government official on the island, prohibited prostitution in 1824 (although this decree was not strictly enforced until the 1890s [Flores Ramos 1998, 84]). Brothels had been legal in San Juan since the sixteenth century to “protect the honesty of married women in the city” and “to keep order among the settlers by avoiding confrontations that may have occurred in cases of kidnapping, rape, and infidelity” (84). By 1824, however, the need to moralize and control the population necessitated limiting opportunities for vice. Prostitution continued (sheltering or reforming prostitutes was not the objective), but with a closer monitoring of where women could go to sell their services, which prostitutes could stay on the street, and which had to be taken out of circulation. For years the adult male population on the island had outnumbered that of marriageable women. De la Torre’s decree was accompanied by others like it. This excerpt paints a picture of the social and moral cleansing the government undertook to prevent insurrection and promote a moral and obedient society:

In 1824, with the closing of the houses of prostitution and a wave of arrests of vagabonds and criminal elements, the artisans who frequented the gambling houses were fined, and games, with the exception of chess, checkers, backgammon and *chaquete*, were

7. For more on the elite’s relationship to dances of the lower classes, see Suárez Findlay 1999, 56–57.

banned even in private houses, which served as an excuse for police raids on meeting places. And other restrictions were imposed upon the population as fears of political revolt increased. Any person found on the street after 10 P.M. was fined, and all places of public entertainment were forced to close at that hour. It was forbidden to entertain house guests in private homes and penalties were imposed upon those who hid runaway slaves, minors or married women who left their legal owners, parents or husbands to live by themselves. (Ribes Tovar 1972, 108)

This excerpt demonstrates the invasion of public policy into the private spaces of citizens in efforts to limit opportunities for insurrection and impose a moral standard that was arbitrarily decided by local officials.<sup>8</sup> It is particularly noteworthy that the law reinforces the notion of a strong male head of the family; a father who let his wife or children wander from his home could be subject to fines. This excerpt also lumps women together with slaves and children, indicating that they were the “property” that the man of the house was responsible for controlling.<sup>9</sup>

In the mid-nineteenth century, church officials were especially concerned about the increase in premarital cohabitation, which, for the lower classes, mostly composed of black and mixed-race Puerto Ricans, was easier than finding time and money to marry.<sup>10</sup> Suárez Findlay claims that concubinage and serial long-term monogamy without marriage were so deeply

8. Ironically, starting in 1837 with the Spanish captain-general Angel Acosta, Spanish governors in Puerto Rico *encouraged* gambling and base entertainment to keep its inhabitants' minds off of insurrection and even built many gambling houses in San Juan for this purpose (Golding 1973, 82).

9. Similarly, the scholar of Latin American history and gender Florencia Mallon, in an article on Peru's transition to capitalism, has found that sexuality, along with control of women's property and labor, were ways that men asserted dominance in the public sphere in Peru in the era from 1830 to 1900: “Men . . . controlled women's sexuality both by defining what was ‘proper’ behavior and by making marriage decisions” (1987, 386). The case studies she lists include that of a man who would not allow his daughter to marry the father of her illegitimate children, as he was from a higher social class and was sure to disgrace her by parading around with other women publicly after their marriage (386). This is an interesting example because it shows that the father could control the sexuality of the women in his family—even if it meant an arbitrary disregard for traditional norms of keeping children within wedlock.

10. Despite church officials' efforts to moralize sexual behavior in the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries, people of the working classes did not change their sexual mores. Barceló Miller cites the development of the single-crop plantation economy as an impediment to the church's edicts; the decline in quality of life and the rigorous planting schedule of slaves and workers prevented them from participating in religious rituals and from formalizing unions through marriage (1987, 74–77).

embedded in the culture of the lower classes that these incentives could not change people's behaviors. Nonetheless, the church sought to gain control over the moral formation of its congregation by reinforcing the importance of marriage and its vehicle was educating women to value holy matrimony. Marriage fees were also removed, to make the institution more accessible to the lower classes, whose lack of concern for formalizing sexual relationships alarmed social policy makers. Ironically, it would not be until the United States introduced divorce after the invasion that marriage would become more desirable to the population at large (Suárez Findlay 1999, 113–16). It was not financial incentive that would encourage couples to formalize their unions, but rather the legal possibility of dissolving the marriage if the partners were unhappy. One can speculate that women in particular might have viewed marriage as a more viable option once they had the possibility to legally separate from an abusive or indigent husband.

Church documents from this era show a two-pronged approach to women's role in this morally chaotic state of affairs: they both condemned women as immoral temptresses and proposed that their female parishioners subscribe to the cult of the Virgin Mary as a shining example to direct them away from evil impulses. The historian of women and gender in Puerto Rico María Barceló Miller uses a phrase to talk about this propagandistic shift in the characterization of women: "De la polilla a la virtud" (1987, 78) (From moth to virtue). The metaphor of woman as a moth—a pernicious insect that devours and ruins fine fabric (innocent men)—is taken from an 1864 ecclesiastic proclamation.<sup>11</sup> Arlene Díaz, historian of women's culture in Venezuela, finds a similar message in church documents after the wars of independence in Gran Colombia: "Not unlike the colonial ecclesiastic discourse on lust and chastity, nineteenth-century religious publications dwelt on the consequences of women's devilish behavior. . . . In sum, women were the . . . 'home of lust and administrator of the demons'; their [sexual] powers could make men lose their domination in society" (Pino Iturrieta 1993 cited in Díaz 2007, 33).<sup>12</sup> The message that women's sexuality was dangerous was found not only in church documents; Díaz notes that the liberator of the Americas himself, Simón Bolívar, often referred in his speeches

11. The analogy is from an 1864 ecclesiastic edict, "La polilla procede de los vestidos y de la mujer la iniquidad del hombre" (Fray José M. Fernández quoted in Barceló Miller 1987, 79) [Moths come from dresses and from woman comes the iniquity of man].

12. Díaz (2007) quotes the Venezuelan historian Elías Pino Iturrieta in the latter's book on women in Venezuelan history, *Ventaneras y castas, diabolicas y honestas* (Iturrieta 1993, 16–17).

to “the dangerous seductive powers of women” and that national rhetoric posited the passion that women could ignite as a force that “could corrupt both men and civilization” (33).

To counteract the socially damaging powers of women’s sexuality, an organized and official cult of the Virgin Mary emerged in the mid 1800s. Barceló Miller has found that the Catholic Church vigorously projected the moral ideal of Mary as a corrective model against flirtatiousness and promiscuity. Two major institutions were founded to propagate the cult, the *Primera Conferencia del Inmaculado Corazón de María* (First Conference of the Immaculate Heart of Mary) in 1859 and the *Congregación de las Hijas de María* (Congregation of the Daughters of Mary) in 1870 (Barceló Miller 1987, 80–81). In 1861 religious retreats with a focus on Mary were organized for women from the capital (80). This impossibly self-sacrificing ideal, this heavenly version of the Angel of the House who gave birth through immaculate conception, set the standard for female asexuality and gained momentum throughout the nineteenth century.

Women’s emulation of the Virgin Mary entailed, according to church documents of the era, the responsibilities of serving as a paradigm of religious devotion (to “save” society), encouraging love for and obedience to father or husband, and performing the role of faithful and docile servant within the family. In return for these services, women, instead of being scorned by the church and patriarchy (as the devouring moth), would receive “protection” and remain sheltered (Barceló Miller 1987, 78–83). Protection had a double meaning: material comforts that men could provide as well as the oppression that came from living in a patriarchal system while receiving some of its conditional benefits.

Another factor that affected political decision makers’ manipulation of female roles in the nineteenth century was the decline in the economy and standard of living. This created a need for women of the lower classes to enter the workforce as housekeepers, seamstresses, and day workers (*jornaleras*). From 1871 to 1880 the number of women who were housewives decreased from 5,520 to 3,844 (a reduction of 1,676) while the number of women in the workforce increased from 299 to 2,184 (Barceló Miller 1987, 85). The church largely ignored this change in women’s roles and continued to uphold Mary as the ideal model for all women. It is likely that women felt conflicted toward the intensification of moral standards set for them, with the promise of patriarchal “protection,” when they were out in the workforce earning a living and working long hours for low wages rather than saying the rosary and attending mass. This clash between symbolic

propaganda and real life was one of the circumstances that likely led women to begin or continue a process of questioning their circumstances. In particular, Capetillo was aware of and wrote about the hypocrisy of the ruling class toward women and the lower classes in her 1911 essay *Mi opinión sobre las libertades, derechos y deberes de la mujer* (My Opinion on the Liberties, Rights, and Responsibilities of Woman).

### Woman Becomes Her Body: The Essentializing Nature of Medical Discourse, Social “Whitening,” and the “Protection” of Women During Modernization

Both liberal and conservative social policies of the nineteenth century in Latin America focused on the female reproductive body as a symbolic and literal space where future generations of citizens could be molded to fit ruling class ideals of “whiteness” and morality, as the Caribbean historian of gender and sexuality Eileen Suárez Findlay, the scholar of eugenics in Latin America Nancy Leys Stepan, Trigo, and others have noted. This trend intensified notably from the 1880s through the early 1900s. While conservative politics often used the aforementioned religious discourses as its vehicle for moralizing women, liberals used Positivist and medical discourse to voice and justify policies that encouraged the erasure of feminine desire in the name of republican motherhood (as we have seen in the cases of Mexico and Peru). At the same time, women’s sexualized bodies were a central focus of medical theories that heavily influenced marriage laws, education, and other social policies into the twentieth century with the politicization of eugenics.<sup>13</sup>

In nineteenth-century Latin America, as in Europe, the principal areas of university studies for men of the privileged classes were law and medicine, which meant significant overlap among professions in the ruling class. Doctors held weight in the political arena on questions of public health and morality.<sup>14</sup> Writers and politicians were sometimes trained as doctors or had influential friends or advisors who were trained in the medical profession (Stepan 1991, 40–42). Positivism (a philosophical approach to society and

13. See Stepan 1991.

14. Several examples are Zeno Gandía, a medical doctor who held several political posts and was a pro-independence advocate, and Drs. José Celso Barbosa and José E. Saldaña, who served on a committee addressing the prohibition of prostitution in the late 1890s (Flores Ramos 1998, 87).

government that focused on science and progress) and eugenics are two examples of how medicine drove social and political thought and practice. These policies sexually oppressed men (in particular, Afro–Puerto Rican men in regard to white women) and women of the lower classes and, to a lesser extent, women of the bourgeoisie in an effort to “whiten,” moralize, cure (to use Trigo’s term), and generally control the population. As Stepan put it, in Latin America around the 1870s “science became a rallying cry for the modern, secular elite” (41). Science was, to a large degree, perceived as a panacea for Spanish American social ills.

Social policies focused on women’s sexuality logically manifested themselves in marriage laws. In 1805 “persons of recognized nobility” were permitted to marry people of “Negroid castes” (quoted in Ribes Tovar 1972, 96). This legislation was economically favorable to Afro–Puerto Rican women, because usually the person of higher social rank was a *criollo* man who married a woman of mixed or African origin; women of European descent were traditionally less likely to marry Afro–Cuban men.<sup>15</sup> The impetus for this law was likely twofold: to whiten the offspring of Afro–Puerto Rican women by allowing the latter to marry white men, and to legitimize cohabitation that carried on regardless of whether it was officially condoned.

While these social and political actions seem to have been aimed at protecting women by providing them with physical security in institutions and economic security through marriage to “whiter” partners, they also focus on women almost exclusively as reproductive bodies, rather than citizens with civil liberties. Few or no laws were upheld to protect Afro–Puerto Rican women from abuse by their white husbands, for example. The liberal policies the intellectual elite enacted carried as a subtext a strong desire to bring women’s sexuality within bounds, whether by marriage or through segregated spaces within institutions. So, social policies of the times had a double result: greater opportunity for women’s security (if we loosely define

15. Benigno Sánchez-Eppler (1994) analyzes policies of social whitening, or *blanqueamiento*, in nineteenth-century Cuba that encouraged women of all races to find the whitest partner possible for reproduction, leading to the social “castration” of black men, to use Sánchez-Eppler’s term. It can be assumed that a similar process was under way in Puerto Rico, a country similar to Cuba in its interracial population being produced from the slave trade. Another legislative act aimed at favoring marriage in lieu of premarital cohabitation of interracial couples was the 1881 abolition of a law that forced people of different racial backgrounds to obtain special permission to marry (Ribes Tovar 1972, 96). Its elimination did away with additional fees and delays that prevented couples from legitimizing their unions.

security as the insurance of a bond of marriage with a domestic partner), accompanied by social codes of seclusion aimed at limiting women's social agency and private lives.<sup>16</sup> It is this social desire to contain the female body without considering women's well-being and happiness that Roqué's novel highlights and criticizes.

Early manifestations of medical theories in politics, which included social whitening, are explored by writers of the turn-of-the-century Spanish-speaking Caribbean. Social policies discouraged *mulata* and white women of the lower classes from having children with darker-skinned men, as the scholar of Caribbean and sexuality studies Benigno Sánchez-Eppler has shown in historical documents and in his reading of the well-known Cuban novel by Cirilo Villaverde *Cecilia Valdés* (1882), while marriage of light-skinned *mulata* women with *criollo* men was encouraged to whiten the population and create "legitimate" families.<sup>17</sup> Zeno Gandía's *La charca* offers a medicalized and essentializing perspective of the lack of control over the reproductive cycle of the *jibara* (female Puerto Rican agricultural worker) and subsequent production of poorly cared for and illegitimate children. As Trigo puts it in his analysis of the Colombian Jorge Isaacs's widely read novel *María* (1867), "The sexual organs of women's bodies are not simply an aspect of the political crisis each author seeks to describe, but its determining aspect" (1995, 49). The public project of controlling women's sexuality was seen as one way of creating a healthy, virile nation vis-à-vis Spain and, later, the United States.

One of the ways that a medically derived social outlook manifested itself was in a marked increase in institutions throughout Spanish America intended to confine individuals who "contaminated" a population with sexual deviance, vagrancy, or mental illness.<sup>18</sup> Along with creating institutions to

16. Félix V. Matos Rodríguez (1999) views the creation of institutions for women workers in the second half of the nineteenth century as a way to perpetuate exploitative urban domestic labor after abolition.

17. For a detailed discussion of miscegenation in connection with racial and class issues in nineteenth-century Cuba, see Martínez-Alier 1989.

18. Foucault's (1988) *Madness and Civilization* is a book-length scholarly study that offers reflections on representations of madness in historical documents and fiction. Among the many functions and faces of madness, Foucault traces the institutionalization of madness as a scapegoat to replace leprosy in the mid-sixteenth century. Institutionalizing the insane served to marginalize them and thus protect the mentally healthy from alleged contamination. See also *The Birth of the Penitentiary in Latin America* (Salvatore and Aguirre 1996). For an analysis of the medical profession's exploitation of power to marginalize hegemonically undesirable segments of society in Argentina, see Salessi 1995. For a history of modern psychiatry's abuse and oppression of women, see Chesler 1997.

contain threatening subjects, authorities arbitrarily expanded their definition of crime to castigate women who had not in fact committed a crime, but who were suspected of engaging in sexual activity outside a committed relationship. Findlay's research shows that in Ponce authorities pursued a crack-down on any perceived "immoral" transgression by working-class women by labeling them prostitutes and persecuting them under the law: "By 1896 working women accused of nonmonogamy or unruly behavior were immediately labeled prostitutes and as a result suffered public harassment, fines, and imprisonment" (1997, 471). Similarly, as Trigo has shown, medical discourse on real and invented social diseases was inspired by intellectuals' fear of the Afro-Puerto Rican body and the lack of control over women's reproductive bodies. In turn, the social policies that the elite adopted to control these perceived ailments played upon the fears of the population at large, by discursively connecting social diseases with imagery of vampires and Medusas (Trigo 1995, 6, 69–89). Most of the institutionalized forms of social control were directed at the Afro-Puerto Rican population and lower classes for alleged criminal or deviant behavior and prostitution. Bourgeois and elite women faced harsh consequences for asserting their sexual desires or engaging in any behavior that questioned their decency, especially if their sexual agency took the form of adultery.

There are several types of institutional administrative action in the nineteenth century that indicate a greater concern for the control and confinement of reproductive female bodies. These were the segregation of women from men in state institutions that housed various types of social misfits (orphans, delinquents, people with mental illness), and legislative efforts made to facilitate marriage and limit concubinage. While sexual segregation in institutions benefited women because it greatly reduced the threat of rape, the driving factor was to monitor the movement and location of female bodies in society to impede the reproduction of morally weak, degenerate, and nonwhite Puerto Ricans. In the mid-1800s public health and service institutions began to segregate facilities by gender. One hospital specifically for women, called the Hospitalillo de la Concepción (Little Hospital of the Conception), had existed since 1615 and in 1823 was made co-ed municipal property (Ribes Tovar 1972, 95). In 1838 the hospital's administration segregated male and female prisoners. In 1872 the residents of the Asilo de Beneficencia (Asylum of Beneficence, an orphanage, institution for people with mental illness, reform home for prostitutes and criminals, and old-age home) were categorized and divided by sex and condition (Ribes Tovar 1972, 96). Prior to this, inhabitants of both sexes shared latrines in the *asilo*.

These changes were the result of medical theories of hereditary disease and miscegenation that drove social change.

Separating patients was not always enough to maintain hygienic categories; some medical institutions themselves had to be distanced from one another, literally and symbolically, to preserve the purity of the one from contamination by the other, as in the case of two women's hospitals in San Juan. The Hospital Especial de Mujeres (Women's Special Hospital) was established in 1895 to treat prostitutes for venereal disease and other conditions (Flores Ramos 1998, 87–89). As gender and sexuality scholars Donna Guy, Beatriz Calvo Peña, and others have found, stricter policies to regulate prostitution were common throughout Latin America near the end of the century and Puerto Rico underwent this process as well. In 1893 Spanish authorities approved a document of prostitution hygiene rules, which not only dictated sanitary conditions and disease control measures, but also controlled the location of prostitutes' bodies, as certain areas of the city were off limits to them in an effort to preserve these areas from the corrupting presence of the sinful women.<sup>19</sup> However, physical distancing of prostitutes was not enough. Irrational ruling-class fear of the corrupting presence of ambulatory female sexuality and its accompanying diseases, known under the name of "prostitute," is apparent in the dispute that arose in naming the Women's Special Hospital. Dr. Lugo Viñas, the director of the Women's and Children's Hospital, protested the similarity of the name of the prostitutes' hospital, where "women suffering from particular ailments would be assisted and cured," while his institution was established for the "assistance and cure of honest women in need of aid . . . and for the class of women who were able to afford the expenses of being treated at his hospital, for the cure of their ailments" (Archivo General de Puerto Rico, Fondos Municipales, Serie de San Juan quoted in Flores Ramos 1998, 89). In this dispute we see a sharp distinction between the class of honest and "decent" ill women and the grouping of those who were "indecent" and ill. What is interesting is that Lugo Viñas's fear (and the fear of the class whose interests he represents) is of the *symbolic* closeness of the two in the name, rather than any type of objective medical danger or contamination by physical contact (Dr. Lugo Viñas does not complain of the proximity of the Women's Special

19. Although the effort to regulate prostitution began under Spanish authority, Protestant influence under U.S. rule increased campaigns against both prostitution and drinking alcohol (just as temperance was sweeping through regions of the United States, so efforts were made to enforce the practice on the inhabitants of Puerto Rico [Flores Ramos 1998, 88]).

Hospital). Just as the police authority in Ponce arbitrarily defined prostitution to punish noncriminal yet transgressive behavior displayed by its women, Lugo Viñas is an example of a man of medicine in power reaching beyond the boundaries of empirical science to control the abstract elements of society to an ideological end: the symbolic distancing of overt, unclean female sexuality from a “protected” space inhabited by honorable women. As Flores Ramos points out, the doctor cannot even bring himself to use the word *prostitute* in his official letter (89), endeavoring to maintain a safe symbolic distance from it.

Although the examples above focus on the marginalization of women who belonged to lower social classes, they show us that discourses regarding women were obsessively focused on the reproductive body, and this outlook was projected onto women of the ruling classes as well. This essentializing view of woman as womb is clear in the enclosure policies for “decent” bourgeois women across Latin America, enforced to protect their virginity, and it is evidenced by the emphasis on teaching them proper hygiene and infant care rather than providing them with an education on par with that of the men of their social class.<sup>20</sup>

### Traditional Women’s Education, Bourgeois Women’s Sexuality, and Early Feminists

A brief discussion of women’s education is relevant to the following chapter in that Roqué taught school and actively proposed broader curricula for women to better match the academic formation of the men of their class. I will trace some history of women’s education in Puerto Rico to show how, in response to liberalism, “Puerto Rican bourgeois feminists began to articulate their own moral vision of egalitarian elite marriages . . . and the white, wealthy women’s right to intellectual and sexual fulfillment” (Suárez Findlay 1999, 15).<sup>21</sup>

As we have seen in the cases of Mexico, Peru, and elsewhere in Latin America, women’s education was used in the nineteenth century as a nation-building tool for the new republics. Puerto Rico was under Spanish rule until

20. For a discussion of policies of enclosure for women, see Chapter 1 of this study.

21. As the tone of Suárez Findlay’s (1999) quote indicates, early bourgeois feminists did not enfranchise their mixed-race sisters into these objectives. Instead, bourgeois and elite women helped lower-class women through charity and beneficent institutions, but it is not likely that they did it in an attempt to grant them equal rights and privileges.

1898 and that of the United States thereafter, so education did not have the same impetus as in independent nations. Discourses and educational policies implementing ideals for women of domestic household economy and motherhood were prevalent in efforts to push the island toward modernization and to mitigate social ills such as infant mortality and promiscuity: “Puerto Rican women of whatever class, it seemed, were [accused of being] unfit mothers, a major cornerstone of Puerto Rico’s weakness” (Suárez Findlay 1999, 59). While in other Latin American countries the emphasis was on perfecting women to be mothers of future citizens of an independent nation, in Puerto Rico the Catholic, royalist, liberal, and Positivist discourses had an accusatory slant that focused on the sexually open female body.<sup>22</sup> Political treatises of the times aimed to better bourgeois women’s preparation in domestic skills, religion, hygiene, and basic literacy as a way to protect their honor and push them toward rearing a community of intelligent and virile young men (future leaders and professionals) and obedient, prudent young women (future mothers).<sup>23</sup> A young woman’s proper behavior and clean reputation were grave matters, as Spain’s legal definition of virginity referred

22. The Catholic discourses that focus on women’s dangerous seductiveness outlined in this chapter find their parallel, expressed in more objective terms, in writings such as Zeno Gandía’s (1887) medical studies on Puerto Rican women and infant hygiene. Zeno Gandía’s essentializing view of women conflates woman with their biological functions. This view is clear in his 1887 prize-winning study *Higiene de la infancia* (Hygiene During Infancy), in which he depicts the female body as a source of disease as well as nourishment.

23. For an overview of women’s education in Puerto Rico from its origins to the 1980s, see Rivera (1987). For a thorough history of education for both sexes, see Osuna 1949. What follows is a brief summary of women’s education on the island from the late eighteenth through the nineteenth century.

A mandate from Spain in 1783 called for the establishment of thirty-two schools for girls (Rivera 1987, 121). The results of this ruling were not seen until 1799, when four educational facilities for females were established in San Juan. The curricula of these first schools did not mandate reading and writing; they included catechism, needlework, and manners, while reading was only offered upon request (121). Rivera finds in Osuna’s records that not only were women instructors paid a lower salary than male instructors, but five years later, in 1804, they had still not been remunerated (Osuna 1949, 19, cited in Rivera 1987, 121). Women’s formation was limited to domestic and moral instruction.

In the early nineteenth century, liberal ideas entered Puerto Rico with the successes of the independence movement in South America, which resulted in increased importance being placed on public education for both sexes (Ribes Tovar 1972, 93). In 1820, a woman of modest means named Celestina Cordero y Molina founded a school for girls that included elementary reading and writing as well as Christian doctrine, sacred history, and domestic arts (Ribes Tovar 1972, 92). Great emphasis was placed on manners and decorum; girls were taught to respect their elders and be still in public. It is not so surprising that this narrow scope of subject matter was taught in the first girls’ schools; this follows the evolutionary pattern of women’s education seen in Peru and Mexico. What is remarkable about this school is that Cordero y Molina needed the approval of so many religious and political officials to teach such a traditional curriculum; approval had to be granted from the

to not only the intact hymen, but also the public recognition of her purity: “the *doncellez* [virginity] to which the law refers is that consisting of the state of respectability and the concept of such enjoyed by any young girl while she has not been dishonored in the eyes of society by an act that injures her respectability and constitutes an offence against customs and public morals” (Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Misc. Legal 2314/M quoted in Martínez–Alier 1989, 179–80). While for white Puerto Rican peasant women this meant a moral sexual education to “protect” them from mixing with men of African descent, for bourgeois women it meant jealously guarding their reputations, curbing their flirtatious and frivolous nature, and being transformed into diligent and prudent matrons of their homes.

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bishop, the governor, the high police chief, and the deputies! (Ribes Tovar 1972, 92). This indicates an intensely conservative attitude toward even the most traditional and sanctioned teachings for women. In 1821 an educational facility for female citizens was founded by Vicenta Erickson (Ribes Tovar 1972, 93). Ribes Tovar claims that “[the] government of that period looked with disfavor on public education, since it counted upon ignorance as a protection for national integrity” (93). It was not until 1849 that the girls’ school of the Hermanas del Oratorio de San Felipe (Sisters of the Oratory of Saint Phillip) opened (93).

According to a census from 1860, 40 percent of public schools and 36 percent of private schools were for girls, while 39 percent of all teachers were women (Rivera 1987, 121). By 1864, in San Juan there were eight public schools for girls and one private one, compared with twenty-four schools for boys (94). The teachers were primarily *mestiza* (of mixed Spanish and Indian descent) and Afro–Puerto Rican. Ribes Tovar adds that the teaching staff was “usually composed of one lady of good family,” which can be assumed to mean *criolla*—of pure Spanish origin (94). In 1878, however, the number of girls’ schools dropped to eight for a population of twenty-five thousand citizens (94).

Between 1865 and 1880 the Spanish government began to see education as a means of crushing separatist sentiments (Osuna 1949 cited in Rivera 1987, 122). It seems that influencing education was an ideological battle between the conservative royalists and liberal intellectuals. In 1874 the Spanish governor José Laureano Sanz fired all island-born teachers from the public school system and replaced them with instructors from Spain. An 1880 Spanish decree on education limited public education for girls of the *nivel superior* (highest level of education) to classes such as design, drawing, sewing, and domestic arts (Rivera 1987, 124). Spanish decision makers were even less interested in developing women’s intellectual growth than were liberal intellectuals, who were driven by the ideal of republican motherhood.

Five schools of importance opened for girls between 1880 and 1886: Sagrado Corazón de Jesús (Sacred Heart of Jesus, 1880); Instituto de Segunda Enseñanza (Institute of Secondary Learning, 1883); and the Sociedad Protectora de la Inteligencia (Protectorate Society of Intelligence, 1886), the last being an organization that awarded scholarships to students to continue their studies in Spain (Ribes Tovar 1972, 94–95). These were all schools that shared the curricula of Catholic schools in other Latin American countries and shared the ideal that excluded advanced studies in all areas, and especially the sciences. Records show that during this time nuns also gave free instruction to a small number of female children from poor families (94). Women’s overall participation in the education of their sex, however, was limited and underpaid. A survey from 1880 shows that women educators in girls’ schools received, on average, only 67 percent of male educators’ salaries in schools for boys (Rivera 1987, 124). This differential persisted in the surveys of following years.

Like marriage laws, the colonial interest in women's education was to aid in the process of whitening the culture. The ruling class believed that women's education was necessary to "purify the island's unhealthy heterogeneity and move beyond the economic and political stagnation in which they believed Puerto Rico was trapped" (Suárez Findlay 1999, 53). As Suárez Findlay has noted, and as was true in other Latin American societies, it was not just the color of a Puerto Rican's skin that determined that person's social standing or whiteness, but also his or her lifestyle and level of education. For instance, a white woman who allowed herself to be courted by a man of mixed race could have been considered less white, regardless of her family's social standing and the lightness of her skin. Educating women of all classes (with curricula guided by social status) would promote respectability (associated with socially desirable European qualities) and reduce adultery by men because they would esteem their wives more as partners.<sup>24</sup> The hope of liberals was that well-educated mothers "would then raise the de-Africanized, disciplined laborers, on the one hand, and assertive, virile white citizens, on the other, who were necessary to form a newly prosperous Puerto Rico" (59). This process of whitening through the rearing of so-called civilized, industrious citizens and the association of these ideals with white bodies of European immigrants was widespread in Latin America, where immigration laws provided incentives to these foreigners.

As Suárez Findlay notes, the "'dangers' [of women's sexual transgression] threatened many components of elite identity: familial honor; the alleged link between class privilege, racial purity, and female sexual control; and male claims to exclusive ownership of women's sexuality and sentiments" (1999, 62). She also points out that the characterization of woman as educated members of the elite class grew from the men of the ruling class's visions of what the "proper," "healthy" bourgeois Puerto Rican family should look like, *not* women's own ideas of self-fulfillment (62). Independently educated women of the bourgeoisie such as Roqué, however, contested these limiting goals of education, arguing that women needed intellectual stimulation for its own sake. Educating women thus yielded a result that male intellectuals had not anticipated, as Lola Rodríguez de Tió pointed out in 1875: "Women's education could be an obstacle to the ill-conceived ends of frivolous men, because a lettered woman will not always

24. The liberal elite perceived women of principally African heritage, however, to be too dominated by sensuality to reap the benefits of education (albeit the degree of perceived Africanness could vary depending on a woman's social status and lifestyle).

have the flexibility that the male ego requires” (cited in Suárez Findlay 1999, 63). Early feminists were aware, then, that efforts to educate them were not intended to encourage them to speak their minds and enter a process of subjectification through actualizing their desired selves, if these self-forged identities contradicted male-authored notions of their social roles.

Feminism in late nineteenth-century Puerto Rico grew out of this conflict between the liberal elite’s political goals and bourgeois women’s personal goals for self-realization. In the face of a strong push for conservative curricula for girls that focused on domestic and religious instruction, a handful of men and women were actively pursuing a broader range of courses for women as well as more facilities and instructors to reach a greater number of students. According to the Puerto Rican historian Yamila Azize Vargas, early feminist ideas came to Puerto Rico through male intellectuals such as Eugenio María de Hostos, Salvador Brau, Alejandro Tapia y Rivera, and Manuel Fernández Juncos.<sup>25</sup> Although they did not support the social equality of women, these men envisioned education as a means of bettering women’s social condition and denounced their poor working conditions in the early 1900s (Azize Vargas 1987b, 19). Tapia also directed a journal for women, *La Azucena* (The White Lily), and defended women’s rights. Azize Vargas recognizes Roqué, along with Rodríguez de Tió, as the first women to defend women’s rights to better education and more participation in extradomestic spheres (19).<sup>26</sup> Rodríguez de Tió and Roqué both wrote about and supported the expansion of education for women, suffrage, and feminism. In 1872 in Santiago, Chile, Hostos made a declaration against the inferior position of women in which he used

25. These men are well-known figures in Puerto Rican letters. Eugenio María de Hostos (1839–1903) was an educator, novelist, literary critic, and thinker with a broad humanist background in sociology and philosophy whose thought influenced related fields, such as political science and economics. He was also an activist for the abolition of slavery and for Puerto Rican and Cuban independence from Spain. Salvador Brau (1842–1912) was a poet, novelist, essayist, playwright, journalist, and historian who also wrote about public education for peasant women. Alejandro Tapia y Rivera (1826–82) contributed to Puerto Rican letters an extensive opus of poetry, prose, and drama; he is among the most important figures in Puerto Rican literature. Manuel Fernández Juncos (1846–1928) was born in Spain and moved to Puerto Rico when he was twelve years old. He was a poet, writer, and journalist who founded several important liberal periodicals on politics and the arts. He was active in education reform and in politics as part of the Partido Autonomista, a liberal party in Puerto Rico that attempted to work with liberal Spanish politicians, but later abandoned his political career over a fallout with the party, focusing instead on education reform.

26. Young ladies of the wealthy class were not left completely uneducated, even before the era of education reform. They were taught catechism and some literacy and social skills and were expected to cultivate some special talent, such as painting, playing the piano, or embroidery.

scientific language to condemn women's traditional domestic and religious education (Ribes Tovar 1972, 113). He condemned society's pressure on women to be attractive (and little else) because it rendered them frivolous. Hostos denounced the government's neglect of women's education and its focus on them as reproductive bodies: "Woman has been reduced to the level of a two-legged mammal which procreates its kind, which feeds its biped offspring from its breasts, which sacrifices to the life of the species its own individual existence" (quoted in Ribes Tovar 1972, 113).<sup>27</sup> Hostos's words appear to be in dialogue with the objectifying discourses that focus more on women's wombs than on their status as whole individuals with intellectual, psychological, and emotional facets to their being. Since social degeneration was associated with the uncivilized, unevolved, or animalistic vocabulary with which Hostos imbues his speech, the word choice plays on a deep fear of the ruling class. The implication is that women pass these characteristics on to their children, thus breeding a degenerate and weak citizenry.

At the end of the century, bourgeois women in Puerto Rico took a relatively more active part in educating women from the lower classes by creating organizations to fund girls' educations. The 1886 pamphlet *Reglamento de la Asociación de Damas para la Instrucción de la Mujer* (Regulations of the Association of Ladies for the Instruction of Woman [1886]) contains government-approved rules for the Proyecto de Reglamento (Project of Regulation), which was carried out by the Women's Association for Women's Education.<sup>28</sup> The organization was under the patronage of the condesa de Verdú. It was a privately funded body, and the pamphlet seems to have served as a charter, with articles stating the goals, governing posts, sources of funding, and other rules for the association's actualization of funding and encouraging women's education.

The Women's Association's impetus for supporting education was the "notable desarrollo que va ganando en Europa y América la educación e instrucción de la mujer" (notable development that women's education is gaining in Europe and America). So one impetus for change, from the elite ladies' perspective, was to keep Puerto Rico up to date with cultural

27. Another man who rallied for the education of women and did so in terms of the importance of educating female citizens in order to achieve progress for the new nations was Tapia y Rivera (see Ribes Tovar 1972, 113).

28. This was an organization officially recognized in 1885 by the government and the Teachers' Association (Asociación de Maestros).

norms in Europe and North America. The association also recognized the responsibility of the “las más elevadas clases” (the most elevated classes) to take care of the education of “hijas de familia pobre o medianamente acomodadas que tengan vocación para la enseñanza” (5) [daughters of poor or lower middle-class families who have a vocation for teaching]. The tone in these statements is noteworthy because it is not one of solidarity with women of the working classes, but rather one of paternal (or maternal) protection, not unlike the discourse of the male liberal elite. While women of the upper classes recognized a responsibility to educate those of the lower classes, fear of racial and class conflict and differences prevented any real enfranchisement of lower-class women into bourgeois women’s early feminist imaginings.

The Asociación de Damas did, nonetheless, promote job skills and literacy for women who may have otherwise remained ignorant. The goal of the organization was to finance the education of women who wanted to be teachers and administrators, and a future goal was to finance the education of women in commerce, telegraph operation, typography, book-binding, obstetrics, and other areas (6).<sup>29</sup> The common ideology between upper-class women and the male intellectuals who were their relatives and acquaintances is apparent in the Asociación de Damas’ interest in promoting medical advances advocated by the ruling class. For example, the charter states that individuals could earn the title of protector if they actively participated in efforts to vaccinate the population and promote proper hygiene.<sup>30</sup>

Roqué, who was carefully educated by her learned grandmother from a young age, was a feminist pedagogue who had the confidence to strive beyond male-dictated norms of education. She founded several girls’ schools and spent her life educating young women of the island. Breaking out of the standard curricula of her day, she stressed the necessity that girls study the

29. Article 7 of the charter states that the funding will come from members’ dues, “subvenciones” from the town hall and provincial government and other associations, personal or business donations, inheritances, proceeds from theater performances, conferences, sales (“bazar”), scholastic expositions, and interest accumulated on the funds from local branches (Reglamento 1886, 8). In addition to these sources of funding, article 10 sets down the different classes of members (*fundadores, natos, de mérito, protectores*, and so on), whose contributions include land, financing a young woman’s education, lending one’s professional services to the organization, writing essays propounding the merits of women’s education or offering an award for such an essay, donating books, and donating items to sell in the bazaar, among others.

30. This is taken from the charter in article 10, number 4 (for the title of protector), item 7: “Las que procuren con todo celo y eficacia la propagación del virus vacuno y el cumplimiento de las disposiciones sobre la higiene” (*Reglamento* 1886, 12).

natural sciences, and she herself was a student of Positivism. Roqué used this philosophy, which had been exploited by men to essentialize women, to empower them instead, as we see in this quote from her 1888 textbook *Elementos de la geografía universal* (Elements of Universal Geography): “[Civilized are those] . . . who make progress in science, the arts, and all the fields of human knowledge; civilized peoples respect women, the law, and religion, rewarding talent, effort, service, and merit” (Roqué quoted and translated in García Padilla 1999, 50). In her study on Roqué as educator, the scholar of education María del Carmen García Padilla notes that Roqué “shared with Positivism the view that the systematic study of the natural sciences provides an objective approach to the order of the world and contributes to the adequate development of human rational capacities” (51). Unlike Comte, however, Roqué applied this view to women; in addition to opening girls’ schools and spearheading suffrage, she also founded several important early feminist women’s journals and vocational programs for women. Like Cabello and Pardo Bazán, Roqué embraced Positivism without abandoning her Catholic faith (García Padilla 1999, 51)—and, also similar to these women writers, it was in her best interest to do so, as women intellectuals who strayed too far from the norms of femininity were often scorned and shut out by their male peers, which diminished their power to enact positive change.

The U.S. presence after 1898 had a significant impact on education in Puerto Rico. Education was made universal, free, and available to children in rural areas, whereas prior to this time schools had been concentrated in the cities. It seems that Puerto Ricans had control over many of the decisions that were made in curricula and planning, as seven of the nine members of the Junta de Educación were Puerto Rican (Rivera 1987, 126); however, the process of Americanization, as it was called, was imposed upon Puerto Ricans. Roqué embraced U.S. intervention on the island at first, but later grew disillusioned as she discovered that the occupation and the advancements in technology and education brought with them a strong agenda of acculturation of Puerto Ricans to U.S. customs, including the use of English in the classroom (García Padilla 1999, 54). During the first decades of the twentieth century, with the expansion of the service sector and the need for more educated workers, women gained greater access to higher education. Until her death in 1933, Roqué remained “the most ardent feminist, the firmest defender of the rights of women, eroded by laws and societies created by men that have fallen prey to inhuman selfishness” (Roqué 1917 quoted and translated in García Padilla 1999, 56).

## Conclusions

Under both Spanish and U.S. domination, ruling-class Puerto Ricans thought that by solving the population's numerous social "illnesses," that is, racial heterogeneity, promiscuity, alcoholism, and other undesirable traits that were considered hereditary, they could begin to eliminate these problems in future generations. In an attempt to stamp out such negatives, they focused on controlling women's bodies and sexuality because of their belief in the hereditary nature of degeneracy and delinquency, on the one hand, and industry and morality, on the other. Women could thus be socially conditioned and educated to choose lighter-skinned partners and ingrain hygienic morals in their children. Liberal and conservative politicians as well as the Catholic Church attempted to deny, stifle, or channel women's sexuality through marriage laws, education, recreation, and dress codes.

Medical discourse played a central role in the ability of the ruling class to enact social policies that limited women's and men's civil liberties. Medical language describing disease and heredity lent official-sounding justification and it inspired fear of the unhygienic consequences of ignoring its imperatives. These consequences could be revolts from a growing population of oppressed Afro-Puerto Ricans (the fear still lingered from the bloody Haitian revolt of 1791), a population unprepared for the independence it hoped to gain one day, or a nation of "too dark" illegitimate children whose mothers did not bestow upon them a hegemonic system of values. In all these policies of social regulation, the essentialized reproductive female body was the locus of control.