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Puerto Ricans in the Empire: Tobacco Growers and U.S. Colonialism

Teresita A. Levy

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Most studies of Puerto Rico's relations with the United States have focused on the sugar industry, recounting a tale of victimization and imperial abuse driven by the interests of U.S. sugar companies. But in*Puerto Ricans in the Empire*, Teresita A. Levy looks at a different agricultural sector, tobacco growing, and tells a story in which Puerto Ricans challenged U.S. officials and fought successfully for legislation that benefited the island.

Levy describes how small-scale, politically involved, independent landowners grew most of the tobacco in Puerto Rico. She shows how, to gain access to political power, tobacco farmers joined local agricultural leagues and the leading farmers' association, the Asociación de Agricultores Puertorriqueños (AAP). Through their affiliation with the AAP, they successfully lobbied U.S. administrators in San Juan and Washington, participated in government-sponsored agricultural programs, solicited agricultural credit from governmental sources, and sought scientific education in a variety of public programs, all to boost their share of the tobacco-leaf market in the United States. By their own efforts, Levy argues, Puerto Ricans demanded and won inclusion in the empire, in terms that were defined not only by the colonial power, but also by the colonized.

The relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States was undoubtedly colonial in nature, but, as *Puerto Ricans in the Empire* shows, it was not unilateral. It was a dynamic, elastic, and ever-changing interaction, where Puerto Ricans actively participated in the economic and political processes of a negotiated empire.

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