

Working towards health, Christianity and democracy: American colonial and missionary nurses in Puerto Rico, 1900–30¹

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At the turn of the twentieth century American nurses went to Puerto Rico as members of the Army Nurse Corps, as colonial service workers and as Protestant missionaries. Though the nurses went as members of very different organisations they all espoused similar messages about America, Christianity and trained nursing. This chapter explores the overlapping messages of Protestant missionaries and of the United States (US) colonial administration in Puerto Rico from 1900 to 1930, and highlights the ways US nurses embodied those messages and participated in the Americanisation campaign.

In 1898, after the Spanish–American War, the US took possession of former Spanish colony, Puerto Rico. The transfer of colonial administration of Puerto Rico from the Spanish to the US took place on social, religious and governmental levels. The colonial and missionary administrators needed trained nurses to effectively run their public health and hospital facilities. These same administrators also wanted to reform the nation of Puerto Rico itself, and trained nursing was one way they sought to enact those reforms. Lest the nurses seem like unwitting tools, I argue that these nurses agreed that Puerto Rico needed their help and they were complicit in the colonial agenda.

The Puerto Rico colonial government's annual reports to the Department of War and mission reports reveal a strong connection between the missionary evangelical aims and the US government colonial goals for Puerto Rico. Both groups believed in the power of nursing training to 'improve' Puerto Rican society. The US colonial government promoted trained nursing as part of its Americanisation

campaign to prepare Puerto Rico for eventual statehood or self-governance. Colonial administrators believed that nursing was essential to this goal because trained nurses would minister to their countrymen and demonstrate proper sanitation and health practices. Similarly Protestant missionary nurses expected that their Puerto Rican nursing students would bring both American-style healthcare and the Gospel to their patients, families and local communities.

American nurses who worked in Puerto Rico were full participants in the colonial agenda. These nurses not only understood the expectation that they would support the colonial mission, but they agreed with that mission and worked hard to introduce American-style nursing into the Puerto Rican culture. Trained nurses believed theirs was a profession that could transform a culture through women's education, scientific medicine and proper hygiene. Nurses in public and mission hospitals all preached the same gospel of professionalism and of 'America' in their colonial work in Puerto Rico.

US Colonial administration: remaking Puerto Rico

The Spanish American War broke out in April, 1898 after the sinking of the USS *Maine* in Havana harbour.² The US justification for the war was to support the Cuban freedom fighters in their resistance to Spanish colonial rule. Altruism towards Cuba may not have been the only motive for the war, but any aspirations of absorbing Cuba as a US territory were hampered by the Teller Amendment to the Declaration of War. This amendment stipulated that the US would not establish a colonial presence in Cuba.³ Although the war was focused on Cuba, the rest of Spain's colonies, including Puerto Rico, became military targets to prevent them from sending reinforcements. Active fighting was over by August, with a peace treaty signed in December, and ratified by Congress in February, 1899. With the Treaty of Paris, the US acquired Guam, Puerto Rico and Cuba, and paid Spain 20 million dollars for the Philippines. Previously the US absorbed new territory with the intention of settling it and eventually incorporating it as a state. This was the first time the US deliberately acquired territory to maintain exclusively as a colony.

Puerto Rico was administered by a military governor until 1900, when it transitioned to a civil governorship that lasted until 1949,

when the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico was established. Strikingly, the US had no formal plan for the management of the new territories. The Teller Amendment was explicit that Cuba was not to become a territory of the US after the war, but it did not place any such restrictions on any of the other Spanish territories (Guam, Puerto Rico or the Philippines).⁴ There was much public debate over the legality and wisdom of taking on colonies.⁵ Eventually the government decided to take an educative role in the territories, preparing them for self-rule at some unspecified date. The actual qualities that each territory needed for self-rule were left undefined.

In each of the territories the preparation for self-rule involved an Americanisation campaign designed to prepare the populace for a participatory democracy like that of the US. Julian Go has described the 'tutelary' approach that characterised the US occupation of Puerto Rico, and argues that the colonial state was created as an 'instrument of instruction' with the aim to reinvent the colony in a new American model using cultural reform as an instrument of change.⁶ Americanisation of Puerto Rico took many forms: English became the official language for public education as part of an unsuccessful effort to convert the common language to English from Spanish; Military Governor George W. Davis wrote that establishing 'American customs and policy' would 'accustom the people to act for themselves and not look to the Government for everything, as has been the case until now.'⁷ One of the government's largest efforts was to remove governmental associations with the Roman Catholic Church, and established secular rules for civil life, including civil marriage, divorce and burial. Although nominally secular, the colonial government maintained a close association with Protestant missionaries, and the missions were aligned with the government.

Protestant missionaries and the colonial mission

From the beginning the American presence in the islands was not limited to representatives of the US government. Protestant missionaries had their own unique rationale for participating in the American occupation of Puerto Rico. Under Spain, Roman Catholicism was the state religion, and all other forms of religion, including Protestant Christianity, were outlawed. With the transfer of control to the US,

Puerto Rico became a new Protestant mission field. Protestant missionaries promoted civil reforms because they believed that the ideals and skills of democracy would also help the population turn to Protestant Christianity. Although the missionaries had different end goals from the colonial government, they worked within the stated tutelary structure to educate Puerto Ricans in the workings of modern governance.

Samuel Silva Gotay argues that essential features of Protestantism, such as reading the Bible and worshipping without the hierarchy of ordained clergy, were explicitly political concepts when introduced into a strictly Roman Catholic society. The missionaries themselves, he points out, understood their work in political terms. Literacy would help their congregants' souls because they could then read the Bible, but it would also allow them to participate in the democratic process. Similarly freedom from the Church hierarchy would free Puerto Ricans from 'corrupt' worship, whilst at the same time ensuring the free development of fair and just government.⁸ Historian Ann Wills, in her study of US Presbyterian missions, argues that the missionaries did not separate their religious plans from the country's political agenda, because they could not conceive of them being separate ideals. Rather, Wills suggests, missionaries understood their religion and politics as adding to and improving each other.⁹

H. K. Carrol detailed the interplay between religion and colonial occupiers in Puerto Rico at a 1901 meeting of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. Regarding Puerto Rico, he said that 'the best way to Americanize it is to evangelize it. They understand that there is a difference between the civilization of Spain and that of the United States, and that the type of religion to which they have been accustomed is a bar to intellectual and moral progress.' Carroll went on to explain that evangelising Puerto Rico would not be overly difficult because it was 'now a part of the United States, and will henceforth be ruled by American ideas, embodied in American institutions and laws, and be molded by the influence of our civilization.'¹⁰ Trained nursing became one of several avenues to introducing US culture and ideas in the newly acquired territory.

The colonial government also freely connected the colonial mission with the Christian mission promoted by the Protestants. In 1901 the first civil governor of Puerto Rico, Charles Allen, praised

the Protestant influence in the territory when enumerating the 3,715 Puerto Rican congregants and the 400 students in Protestant-run schools, 'Where the public schools are so inadequate, certainly the teaching of even 300 or 400 pupils is valuable assistance to the cause of education.'¹¹ Two years after taking control of the island, the colonial government considered the missionary education projects as essential to the work of transforming Puerto Rico into a culture with more distinctly American qualities.

Nursing context

By 1898 trained nursing had become a standard fixture in the landscape of American healthcare.¹² Just as Protestant Christianity introduced large social changes into a Roman Catholic society, nursing education in Puerto Rico disturbed the existing social order. Under Spain, women in Puerto Rico were sheltered from public view, and women above the lower classes did not engage in work outside their homes and did not seek higher education. Prior to the American occupation, nursing care in Puerto Rican hospitals was performed by untrained men or Roman Catholic nursing sisters. The very notion of the nursing of strangers, in hospitals and in homes, by women specially educated for the work challenged fundamental aspects of Puerto Rican social and class structure. The nature of the nursing work, the professional standards for education and behaviour and the instruction in English, all coalesced for these nursing students as they became model Americanised citizens of the new, modern Puerto Rico. Indeed, in a history of nursing in Puerto Rico the introduction of American culture that came with the US occupation is credited with completely changing the role of women, and beginning 'a new style of life ... [where] [women?] began to occupy a position at the vanguard of society'.¹³ Catherine Choy, historian of the American colonial nursing presence in the Philippines, has described the effect of the introduction of nursing as both 'liberating and exploitative'.¹⁴ Filipinos were offered educational opportunities, and they benefited from health programmes, but those programmes and opportunities came with a system that promoted US ideals of gender, class and race. Nursing education had a similar social impact in Puerto Rico, and the

introduction of trained nursing into the colony was as much a part of the Americanisation colonial plan as political reforms and attempts at introducing the English language.

I have argued elsewhere that to ignore the complex relationship between nursing and imperialism is to deny the power of nurses in colonial settings.¹⁵ The American presence in Puerto Rico was steeped in the language of benevolent duty, progress and reform. Nursing fits perfectly within that ethos. Nurses engendered the Americanisation campaign to a large degree because of the close relationship between nursing and the national mission. Indeed, one of the early colonial projects was the organisation of nursing training schools for Puerto Rican women.

Health, nursing and the colonial agenda

Upon the American takeover in 1898 there were eight municipal hospitals in Puerto Rico, but they were all relatively small and without trained nursing services. In the 1900 Superior Board of Health survey of the hospitals under the item 'qualifications of nurses' the hospital administrator for Arecibo noted that there were 'none required'.¹⁶ Nursing care at that hospital was given by six nursing attendants: four men and two women. The Superior Board of Health believed that nurses did indeed require some qualifications. In fact, the question of nursing qualifications on the survey of hospitals indicated that the Board considered the presence of nurses to be one of the indicators of a hospital's quality. In the 1901 annual report from the government-run Boys' Orphanage, the author notes that 'the Sisters of Charity, though excellent nurses, have neither the sufficient knowledge to work up the prescriptions nor can they assist the doctor in his operations'.¹⁷ The 1899 census counted 127 nurses working in Puerto Rico, sixty-three men and sixty-four women, ranging in age from under fifteen to over sixty-five. Of these, at least fifty nurses couldn't read or write, and only twenty-nine indicated they had any advanced schooling at all.¹⁸ The Board of Health determined that a supply of trained nurses would be vital for the government to adequately care for vulnerable members of the community in asylums, municipal hospitals and orphanages.

In 1901 the legislature met and elected to establish a nursing training school in the three largest cities on the island: San Juan, Ponce and Mayagüez. The governor reported that the need for trained nursing was obvious 'for it has been found well-nigh impossible to have proper nursing for the sick, except such as an untrained woman may instinctively be able to give'.¹⁹ The cities were each given \$1,000 to establish the nursing schools. In San Juan the first of the Insular Training Schools was affiliated with the maternity hospital, and had twelve students. It was run by 'a graduate of one of the best schools in Boston' along with physicians from the local hospitals, and training consisted of three hours of lessons per day, with practical teaching and observation in the afternoon. The other two cities were to establish training schools as soon as they found trained nurses to be superintendents.²⁰

The primary goal of the training school programme was to create an improved supply of health workers, but a secondary goal for the insular nursing school was to give the young women of Puerto Rico another opportunity for respectable employment. In promoting the insular training schools, Governor Hunt wrote, 'We shall then have in three of the largest cities opportunities for Porto Rican young women of sound physical health and earnestness of purpose and ambition to fit themselves for a career of honorable and much-needed public service'.²¹ The initial nurse training programme was limited, only \$3,000 was initially appropriated and there was no ongoing funding stream. Despite the limited funding, the nurse training programme continued, and in 1907 the legislature appropriated funds for an ongoing government training school for nurses under the Department of Education.²² Nursing was a service that was important to the government's ability to provide public health services, but nursing was also part of the transformative purpose of colonial occupation. The insular nursing training school was for special young women who wanted to serve their country, not simply students who wanted a reliable job or who felt inclined towards healthcare. Thus, the work of nursing became one of the ways that the colonial administrators sought to reshape Puerto Rican society. The American Protestant missionaries saw nursing training in Puerto Rico in a similar light.

Protestant mission hospitals and training schools

The Presbyterian medical mission in Puerto Rico began in 1901 with Dr Grace Atkins, who set up a dispensary in San Juan sponsored by the Presbyterian Woman's Mission Board. Almost immediately after her arrival in San Juan, Atkins began advocating for a Presbyterian hospital for San Juan. She described the city's existing four hospitals in a letter to the Woman's Mission Board: a city hospital, 'this is a group of shacks' with Sisters of Charity as nurses; a military hospital; a private hospital for wealthy Spaniards also run by the Sisters of Charity and a small Catholic hospital of only sixteen beds. Atkins wrote of her discontent with sending her patients there:

One patient of mine was sent there in February for an abscess in her middle ear and adjoining bone. They still have her there, and it looks as if they were going to keep her until she dies of old age I felt that the Catholicism had a good deal to do with her stay, and Dr. Green and I decided that she would be our only patient in the Hospital of the Immaculate Conception.²³

Atkins did not like the connection between medical care and the Roman Catholic Church that the hospitals under the Sisters of Charity offered. She wanted to provide care to her patients and to evangelise them herself. For that she needed a Protestant hospital. Atkins was successful in her appeal for a hospital, and the Presbyterian Hospital in San Juan opened in 1904 with a nurse training school under the supervision of two American-trained nurse missionaries: Sarah Burns and Emma Bogart.²⁴

The nurse training school was part of the Presbyterian Hospital plan from the beginning. Atkins wrote of her intention for the school in an early letter seeking support for the project from the Woman's Mission Board:

We would expect to have a training school for nurses, where these Porto Rican girls could be taught to earn a good living The training of nurses and maids would in itself be a big power of good on the Island, as one of our greatest needs here is skilled labor of all sorts.²⁵

Atkins tied the work of the training school to the wider cultural reform of the island. Nursing, in particular, represented that 'big power of good' for Puerto Rican women. A 1919 story of the first nursing graduate of the hospital focused on the benefits of nursing education for

the individual Puerto Rican woman, and through her, the benefit to her family and community:

Had the hospital rendered Porto Rico no other service than just this one to the native girl, its contribution to the island would still have been incalculable: through it there have come to her a new independence of spirit created by a knowledge of her task and her own ability to perform it, a new view of life, and her part in it, and a vision of true service that alone could give her heart for the long years of training and send her out as a district nurse into homes of filth and disease to lighten the burden of her people.²⁶

Nurse training was essential to the functioning of the hospital in order to give adequate care to the patients, but the moral uplift of the entire population was another expected benefit of the training. For the missionaries the story of the first graduate of the hospital school was an example of how ministry at the hands of trained nurses would 'lighten the burdens' of ignorance and disease among the Puerto Ricans.

In Ponce, on the other side of the island, Episcopal Bishop James A. Van Buren began a mission aimed at converting Puerto Rican Roman Catholics to Protestant Christianity. St Luke's Hospital opened in Ponce in 1906, and was expanded in 1907. Van Buren explained the purpose of the medical mission in the 1909 annual report:

People may not listen to the preacher; but here is a message they will gladly heed. Language may be unfamiliar; but the ministrations of the physician and the nurse need no interpreter. Arguments may fail to convince; but the benefits of a Christian Hospital are expressed in terms of action, 'which speaks louder than words,' and admits of no controversy. 'I was sick, and ye ministered unto me.' To him who can say this, there can be [no] higher evidence of the quality of the service he has received.²⁷

This explanation of the ministry/hospital connection was typical of medical missions in this period. Similar to the Presbyterians, the Episcopalians saw their medical work as part of a larger mission to the community, and found nursing to be a fundamental part of that outreach.

The nursing training school at St Luke's opened shortly after the hospital. In a history of the hospital training school the training programme was described in glowing terms:

There, in their own building, are housed some twenty-five pupil nurses, daughters of Puerto Rico, who are being prepared for their noble

profession One can hardly imagine the transformation which takes place in the lives and appearance of these girls during the three years of their training.²⁸

These so called 'daughters of Puerto Rico' were elevated members of their communities, and according to this author, 'in most cases, they are members of our Church.'²⁹ Thus the nursing programme was a success both in educating nurses and in converting students to Protestant Christianity. The Episcopal training school was similar to the Presbyterian school – they were happy with their success at influencing the young women of Puerto Rico – not only by providing the skills for professional work, but also the skills for life and to improve their communities. This education was completely transformative, so much so, that the author suggests that it would be hard to imagine such a change apart from the nursing training itself. For the Episcopalians, much like the Presbyterians, nursing training represented a deeper change for the Puerto Ricans as a whole rather than simply a personal change for their students.

Nursing the new colony

In the insular training schools and the mission school it was American nurses who were the superintendents and heads of nursing. Even after they had Puerto Rican graduates capable of taking the leadership roles, the senior positions went to US citizens. The US nurses who filled these positions were strong advocates of the transformative power of trained nursing. Many had served in the Army or were graduates of elite schools of nursing in the continental US. Although there was a need for trained nurses in public health service, most American nurses worked in hospital training schools. Administrators identified that American nurses' potential influence on nursing trainees was more important to the colonial goals than their direct patient-care abilities. The American nurses also believed their brand of caregiving was superior to a system that relied on untrained attendants and religious workers because trained nursing was based on scientific principles. These nurses had an understanding of an ideal for nursing practice and education that prominently featured three years of post-high school education, in hospitals that were large enough to

offer a wide variety of clinical experiences. Among trained nurses from the mainland US, these were among the elite – trained in the most selective of nursing schools, and expected to uphold a particular standard of practice. Nursing, among this tier of nurses, represented modernity and progress, concepts which were being promoted by the government for the improvement of the island and its people in many avenues, including education, public health and law.³⁰

The early years of the Presbyterian training school presented many challenges. The pupils were not well prepared for the nurse training itself. A hospital history details the specific hurdles in beginning a nursing education programme in Puerto Rico: ‘Porto Rican girls were not accustomed to menial tasks. If a girl had sufficient education to be a nurse she would not do the servile work necessary, or if she were willing to do the work she was not able to learn the lesson.’³¹ Edith Whitley, the Superintendent of Nurses from 1906 to 1910, wrote to the *American Journal of Nursing* (*AJN*) about her experience with nursing training in Puerto Rico. ‘It is difficult to get many desirable applicants for the school. Some are unable to take any sort of a course, for they lack even ordinary intelligence, others have proved morally unfit.’³² Whitley did not believe that the Puerto Ricans had innate qualities that would mesh with the American-style training – qualities that ranged from intelligence and moral fitness to a willingness to work and an understanding of the servile components of duty, although she thought her students were capable of learning. These qualities Whitley believed had to be inculcated in her students, just as the government tried to introduce similar ideals to the colony as a whole.

The primary education system in Puerto Rico was very limited, and many of the training-school students had little formal education prior to beginning their nursing training. Whitley documented her success two years later in a letter to *AJN* with an update on her work: ‘I was quite delighted to hear a patient, a trained nurse [herself] ... say she would not have believed that she was not being cared for by an American, had it not been for the language.’³³ Whitley’s nursing students had changed so much they could now be mistaken for American nurses. Whitley succeeded in training her students to the US standard while outside the mainland, but as a US native in Puerto Rico she also succeeded in passing along her very ‘American-ness’ to her students so completely that one of Whitley’s peers commented

on her success. It was not only the nursing training, or the 'American' qualities, it was both in combination that helped change the students. Changing the students was the first step: the US nursing presence in Puerto Rico was part of a colonial effort to change the country as a whole.

Ellen Hicks, an Episcopal missionary nurse from Pennsylvania, worked at St Luke's in Ponce. Like Whitely she was invested in her students' education and worked hard to promote a professional stature among her students. Hicks was a career missionary. Previous to her time in Puerto Rico she had spent fifteen years in the Philippines at St Luke's Hospital in Manila. There Hicks encouraged her Filipino students to meet high standards of practice, and to pursue graduate training in the US when possible. She continued in this manner in Puerto Rico. Arriving in 1917 she encouraged the nursing students to establish an Alumnae Association and newsletter as an opportunity for professional exchange and support. The newsletter became the first Puerto Rican nursing publication.³⁴ Hicks encouraged the nurses to continue advancing, and it was while she was at St Luke's that Presbyterian Hospital graduate Rosa Gonzalez wrote her first book, *Diccionario médico para enfermeras*.³⁵ As a missionary Hicks was, of course, concerned about the spiritual life of her students, and in that context she helped establish a Guild of St Barnabas chapter. The Guild of St Barnabas was a social and religious organisation for Christian nurses which had branches throughout the US and the *AJN* regularly published Guild reports.³⁶ The Guild sought to gather nurses together as a community united by their profession, because 'the community in general does not appreciate the anxieties, responsibilities, and trials of the nurse's life, and ... [the Guild] aims to supply some of the comfort and power obtained by association, and thus to be helpful to the nurse, whether on duty or not'.³⁷ In this way Hicks mentored her students' entry into the nursing profession and promoted their growth and activism in a distinctly American approach. Hicks spent the rest of her career working at St Luke's in Ponce, finally retiring in 1938. Neither Hicks nor Whitely declared the primacy of nursing or nationalism – they went together in all settings of their work. Success was measured in student achievement and the establishment of the profession on a firm footing in the new territory.

Nursing and conflicting perspectives on race

Americanisation of Puerto Rico also included social reorganisation to align the colony with American ideas about racial and social hierarchies, and this was particularly true with the introduction of nursing into the colony. In the early twentieth century there was no racial identification of Latino ethnicity; rather, racial divisions were based solely on skin colour. This was significant in Puerto Rico, where a significant portion of the population was light-skinned and claimed a European ancestry. A military government annual report included details of the racial makeup of the island inhabitants. The report traced the origins among the Carib Indians called the *Borriqueños*, the early settlement by first Spanish traders and later plantation owners who brought African slaves to the island. The author notes that the races intermingled but that there were some people of pure Spanish ancestry.³⁸ The existing racial hierarchy depended much more on legitimising claims to Spain than solely on skin colour. Nursing in the US at this time was segregated by race, and nursing superintendents made an effort to select students from outside the 'domestic' classes by requiring that applicants had at least a high-school diploma.³⁹ This was an effort to disassociate trained nursing from housekeeping or untrained nursing, and to elevate the work to the status of a profession. In Puerto Rico both the mission hospitals tried to recruit the 'right sort' of nursing students from among the upper classes. For the mission administrators, race was a deciding factor in the effort to introduce trained nursing as a profession.

The Presbyterian training school was segregated by race from its inception. Though not stated as a formal policy in the early years, segregation in the training school remained in place until at least the 1930s. In 1920 the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions and the Woman's Board of Missions received an official petition from Puerto Rican Presbyterians requesting an end to segregation of the nursing students.⁴⁰ Jenny Ordway, hospital superintendent, wrote a reply to the Board: 'I have talked the question of coloured nurses over with all the members of the staff and they are all agreed that this change is absolutely impossible to the best interests of the hospital.'⁴¹ Ordway explained that admitting students of all races would damage the school's reputation; that the school would lose status and

eventually they would be unable to get the 'right' quality of applicants for the training programme. Ordway justified the segregation policy as a recognition of the fact that 'coloured' nursing students would be treated differently by the other students, and that they would have very limited career opportunities after graduation because they could not work with the visiting nurses or public health departments.⁴² The matter was dropped without any change in the admission policy.⁴³

Like the Presbyterian Hospital, St Luke's Hospital in Ponce struggled over race relations. In 1921 Gwendoline Pocock wrote to the Episcopal Foreign Mission Board from the South Porto Rico Sugar Company in Ensenada, Puerto Rico. Pocock had been a mission nurse in Ponce, but left the hospital over her dissatisfaction with her place within the hierarchy of graduate nurses at the hospital. Pocock detailed her list of complaints: first, she had to share a residence and dining-room with the Puerto Rican nurses; second, she was bothered by the political leanings of the Puerto Rican staff towards independence; and finally, 'the American nurses received less than these Porto Rican Graduate nurses, do you realize this? We get \$40.00 per month and they \$50.00 to \$60.00 so a white woman working for less than a colored one?' The hospital and training school at Ponce were not segregated, but US nurse missionaries did not necessarily abandon their understanding of racial hierarchies when they became missionaries. Pocock ended her letter by asking, 'Please do not send anymore unfortunate Americans to St Luke's until other arrangements have been made, it is a waste of money and energy. No sound minded girl will ever stay.'⁴⁴ There is no response to Pocock's letter in the archival record. St Luke's was not segregated, and other missionary nurses worked within the system without complaint on this issue.

Race was a point of conflict for missionaries who were struggling to inculcate 'American' values among their nursing students. At the Presbyterian Hospital the solution was segregation along some undefined colour line. At St Luke's race was one of the factors that influenced missionaries to stay or leave the hospital. Segregation in Puerto Rico under the US was a common experience, as the Presbyterian Hospital experience details; non-white trained nurses were not hired at the 'best' institutions around the island, nor were they part of the government-backed public health nursing programmes. The missions' support of racist policies was another way they supported the

Americanisation campaign on the island. This is not to suggest that a racial hierarchy did not exist in Puerto Rico prior to the arrival of the Americans, but rather that the American racial hierarchy was different from the one that existed previously in the territory, and its introduction caused ripples throughout the social structure of the colony.

Conclusion

Rosa Gonzalez was a graduate of the Presbyterian training school who went on to become a national leader for public health and nursing in Puerto Rico. Gonzalez was a graduate of the Presbyterian Hospital, where she worked from 1910 to 1916. She did postgraduate work at Presbyterian Hospital in New York City, and was in charge of relief work in western Puerto Rico following a devastating earthquake in Mayagüez. Later she became the head of the nursing department at the Episcopal Hospital in Ponce. In 1919 she went to work for the Department of Health in San Juan, where she helped reform the public health system, and eventually she returned to the Presbyterian Hospital to become superintendent.⁴⁵ Gonzalez established the Association of Registered Nurses of Puerto Rico, and extended the Presbyterian Hospital's connections with the Board of Public Health and the Red Cross visiting nurse services in San Juan.⁴⁶ Gonzalez encouraged Puerto Rican students to enrol in postgraduate study in the continental US, and to sit for the licensing boards in mainland states.⁴⁷ Gonzalez was an example of how the mission nurse training dovetailed with the government's plans for the colony. She dedicated her professional life to improving public health on the island, advancing it through the introduction of American-style trained nursing into hospitals, health departments and homes.

US nurses were intimately involved in the US colonial mission in Puerto Rico. The colonial government and missionaries preached a gospel of public health, and each instituted nursing training programmes as a vital part of that message. The Superior Board of Health and the Protestant missions' goals were similar: the education of communities in an American way of health. Nurses served as models for Puerto Rican nursing students in both government and mission schools, and they modelled more than just nursing care. American

nurses, their work and their symbolism were essential for the colonial plan for Puerto Rico because they represented America in so many different ways.

US international expansion was not limited to the Caribbean and Pacific territories obtained in the Spanish–American War. In fact, the US population was ambivalent over the benefit of colonial occupation, as was the government, and most territories were released to their own management shortly after the conclusion of the Second World War.⁴⁸ Despite the decline in US colonial presence, the US influence continued to spread through charitable aid and benevolence organisations. Ian Tyrrell suggests this was a distinctly American style of imperialism – one of ideology rather than physical territory and occupation.⁴⁹ Often it was missionaries or social aid groups that engaged in this cultural transfer, and that includes the American medical missions in India, China, Turkey and Syria. Barbara Reeves-Ellington, Kathryn Kish Sklar and Connie A. Shemo argue that American women missionaries ‘reinvented the meanings of American nationalism and imperialism as they negotiated competing nationalism and imperialisms in varying colonial settings.’⁵⁰ American nurses also upheld the national mission while they offered lessons in nursing and scientifically based healthcare and cared for their students and patients. Nursing was wrapped up in the colonial message in ways too intimate for anyone to untangle, not the colonial administration, mission directors or even the nurses themselves.

Notes

- 1 The research for this chapter was supported through funding from Sigma Theta Tau, Xi Chapter, and the American Association of the History of Nursing. Content from this chapter was previously presented at the Association of Caribbean Historians conference in San Juan, Puerto Rico in 2011.
- 2 Following a season of unrest by Cuban revolutionaries and harsh reprisals from the Spanish government, President William McKinley sent the USS *Maine* to protect US interests in Cuba. On 15 February 1898, the *Maine* was destroyed by an explosion, killing 266 men. The subsequent investigation attributed the explosion to an underwater mine planted by Spain to prevent the United States from entering into the conflict in Cuba. D. Traxel, *1898: The Birth of the American Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998).
- 3 Traxel, *1898*.
- 4 Traxel, *1898*.

- 5 R. L. Beisner, *Twelve against Empire: The Anti-Imperialists, 1898–1900* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968); E. B. Tompkins, *Anti-Imperialism in the United States: The Great Debate, 1890–1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970).
- 6 J. Go, *American Empire and the Politics of Meaning: Elite Political Cultures in the Philippines and Puerto Rico during U.S. Colonialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 27.
- 7 G. W. Davis, *Annual Report to the Secretary of War on Civil Affairs of Porto Rico* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1900), p. 486, <http://books.google.com/books?id=bqcdAQAAIAAJ> (accessed 18 February 2015).
- 8 S. S. Gotay, *Protestantismo y política en Puerto Rico, 1898–1930: hacia una historia del protestantismo evangélico en Puerto Rico* (San Juan, PR: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1997).
- 9 A. B. Wills, 'Mapping Presbyterian missionary identity in *The Church at Home and Abroad, 1890–1898*', in D. H. Bays and G. Wacker (eds), *The Foreign Missionary Enterprise at Home: Explorations in North American Cultural History* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003), pp. 95–105.
- 10 H. K. Carroll, 'Missionary problems of our new possessions', in *Report of the Meeting of the Conference of Foreign Missions Boards in Canada and in the United States January 16–18, 1901* (New York, 1901), p. 123.
- 11 C. H. Allen, *First Annual Report of Charles H. Allen, Governor of Porto Rico, covering the period from May 1, 1900, to May 1, 1901* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1901), p. 55 (LexisNexis US Serial Set Digital Collection).
- 12 Formal nursing education began in the US in the 1870s. By 1880, there were 157 nurses, who had graduated from twenty-six nursing schools. By 1900 those numbers had expanded to about 3,500 graduates from 432 nursing schools. This increase in numbers is significant: in 1910 there were twice the number of graduates as in 1900, from almost twice as many nurse training schools. M. A. Burgess, *Nurses, Patients and Pocketbooks: A Study of the Economics of Nursing by the Committee on the Grading of Nursing Schools* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1928), p. 35.
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- 14 C. C. Choy, *Empire of Care: Nursing and Migration in Filipino American History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 19.
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