History of Education Quarterly (2022), **62**, 84–106
doi:10.1017/heq.2021.61

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

ARTICLE

The "School Question" in an Imperial Context: Education and Religion during and following the Occupations of Cuba and Puerto Rico

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Abstract

The United States occupations of Cuba and Puerto Rico following the War of 1898 instituted immediate reforms to the educational systems of the islands. The imposition of public school systems modeled on those of the United States and a concurrent wave of Protestant schools established by American missionaries are well-known features of the imperialist project. Yet American reforms were shaped by what was known in the nineteenth century as "the school question," or the controversy over the appropriate relationship between schooling, religion, and the government that had pitted the Protestant majority against Catholics and resulted in a consensus that religious-affiliated education should be permitted but relegated to the private sphere. The implementation of this consensus as the basis of occupation policy in Cuba and Puerto Rico, majority Catholic societies, contributed to the significant growth of a system of private Catholic schools and sparked debate about the relationship between religion, education, and nationalism. In an imperial context, "the school question" led to political polarization in the face of persistent US hegemony.

Keywords: School question; Cuba; Puerto Rico; US occupation; private education

Six months after its victory in the War of 1898, the United States signed the Treaty of Paris and entered into possession of what had been Catholic imperial Spain's last holdings in the Americas, Cuba and Puerto Rico.[1] Soon after, a US education journal observed that matters of religion would be key to the country's new imperial endeavor in the Caribbean:

> [What] education there has been in Cuba has been under the supervision of the church and not the state and it will be a big task to transfer the control of the school from the control of the priest to the control of the politician. The

[1]I use the term "War of 1898" here following Louis Pérez in his book with that title to denote the armed conflict in which the United States went to war against Spain and fought with but failed to recognize the Cuban Army of Liberation or Filipino forces who rose up against the US occupation. "Spanish-Cuban-American War" and "Philippine-American War" describe longer conflicts, of which the American intervention was but a part. See Louis A. Pérez Jr., *The War of 1898: The United States and Cuba in History and Historiography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), xii.

> *London Times* predicts that the school question will be the greatest difficulty with which the American people will have to deal.[2]

The difficulties were many during the military occupations of Cuba and Puerto Rico, yet the article was correct in presenting the linkage between the reform of education and the separation of church and state as a matter of great concern for the occupiers—and for the occupied. In both Cuba and Puerto Rico, "the school question," a phrase that served as shorthand in the United States for the long running cultural dispute over the appropriate relationship between schooling, religion, and the government, became a feature of post-1898 society.[3] Among the occupiers, many believed that education was the only remedy to what they saw as widespread ignorance that was the product of centuries of Spanish, and Catholic, domination. In Cuba, Brigadier General Leonard Wood had made a thorough survey of the state of schooling his first priority when he assumed command of the eastern part of the island in 1898 at the end of the hostilities. In regard to the question of church control, he declared that the "practical disestablishment of what had been a state church" effected by the transfer of the island from Spanish to US possession meant that "the participation of the authorities of the church in the control or administration of the public schools, as well as any instruction of a religious nature, must be regarded as inadmissible."[4] Military and civilian occupation officials in Puerto Rico held similar views and worked toward the goal of reducing the influence of the Catholic Church by developing plans for universal public education that would be secular.

The construction of public school systems based on American models and a concurrent influx of Protestant missionaries who founded schools throughout the islands are well-known features of the transformation of education during and following the occupations. They have drawn attention because of the overt way in which these were colonialist efforts to remake Cubans and Puerto Ricans in the image of Americans, a change which would purportedly prepare them for self-government and citizenship in a modern, liberal democracy and market-oriented economy. Another striking feature of the period—a significant expansion of *Catholic* schooling in both Cuba and Puerto Rico—has received less attention, although it was a notable feature of the social and cultural response to American intervention and hegemony. In the colonial period, Cuba and Puerto Rico had had comparatively weak Churches relative to elsewhere in Latin America and certainly to the Philippines. (The conflict over religion in the remaking of the school system in the Philippines during the American occupation is an important comparison case to that of Cuba and Puerto Rico but is outside the

[2]D. M. Harris, "Educational Notes and Current Events: Schools in Cuba," *American Journal of Education* 32, no. 1 (Jan. 1899), 13.

[3]For an overview of what was known at the time as "the school question," see Steven K. Green, "Church and State in Nineteenth-Century America," in *The Oxford Handbook of Church and State in the United States*, ed. Derek H. Davis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 80–84.

[4]"Report of the Board Appointed by General Orders, No. 2 Headquarters Department of Santiago de Cuba, Civil Department, January 4, 1899, for the Purpose of Formulating a Scheme for Public Education in This Province," *Annual Reports of the War Department for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1899* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1900), 857.

scope of this article.) Far from representing the maintenance of a cultural status quo, the new emphasis on schooling by a Church that had been disestablished was a transformation. In Cuba, it led to the development of extensive social organizations for Catholic Cubans in urban areas that in turn engendered a renewed emphasis on evangelization in rural areas, more engagement with Catholic social teachings and reform movements, and an increase in the number of Cubans taking religious vows.[5] This expanded Catholic presence ran up against other Cuban visions of reform that emphasized secularism and anticlericalism. In Puerto Rico, where the US was not bound to give the island its independence as it was with Cuba by virtue of the Teller Amendment, the occupation imposed an Americanization of the upper hierarchy of the Church that had the effect of quickly igniting the question of religious instruction in public schools—in part because it was one that the new American bishops of Puerto Rico knew well. At the same time, the Catholic schools developed in response to the education reforms of the occupiers became embroiled in larger discussions of Americanization given the new orientation of the Puerto Rican Church to the mainland. In an imperial context, "the school question" for Cuba and Puerto Rico further complicated the development of cohesive nationalist projects and contributed to political polarization in the face of persistent US hegemony.

The experiences of Cuba and Puerto Rico suggest the importance of beliefs and attitudes about religion and the separation of church and state to the policies, practices, and outcomes of the US occupations in the realm of education. The understanding of public education that had developed within the United States as a way to accommodate religious pluralism by relegating it to the private sphere was inflected by the anti-Catholicism of the nation's Protestant majority. Reforming education in Cuba and Puerto Rico inevitably brought forth the question of religion given that these were majority Catholic countries, albeit ones in which political liberals had advocated for the separation of church and state and for the expansion of public education during the late colonial period. Historians have established the centrality of education to the US imperial project in the aftermath of the War of 1898 by detailing the reforms to public school systems, highlighting the influence of racial ideologies in these reforms and signaling the importance of Protestant missionary work in the realm of education.[6] This body of work has not addressed the interplay between

[5]Katherine D. Moran, "Beyond the Black Legend: Catholicism and U.S. Empire-Building in the Philippines and Puerto Rico, 1898–1914," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 33, no. 4 (Fall 2015), 27–51; Margaret E. Crahan, "Catholicism in Cuba," *Cuban Studies* 19 (1989), 3–7; Manuel Fernández, *Religión y revolución en Cuba* (Miami: Saeta Ediciones, 1984), 14–19.

[6]Yoana Hernández Suárez, *Colegios protestantes en Cuba* (Havana, Cuba: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2018); Jason Yaremko, "'The Path of Progress': Protestant Missions, Education, and U.S. Hegemony in the 'New Cuba,' 1898–1940," in *American Post-Conflict Educational Reform: From the Spanish-American War to Iraq*, ed. Noah W. Sobe (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 53–74; Yaremko, *U.S. Protestant Missions in Cuba: From Independence to Castro* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000); Louis A. Pérez Jr., *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality and Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 399–404; José-Manuel Navarro, *Creating Tropical Yankees: Social Science Textbooks and U.S. Ideological Control in Puerto Rico, 1898–1908* (New York: Routledge, 2002); A. J. Angulo, *Empire and Education: A History of Greed and Goodwill from the War of 1898 through the War on Terror* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1–50; Solsiree del Moral, *Negotiating Empire: The Cultural Politics of Schools in Puerto Rico, 1898–1952* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013);

beliefs and policies about religious pluralism that informed the growth of public *and* private schooling during and after the occupations. The educational policies of the occupation governments that imposed the United States response to the "school question" would spark debate about the nature and legitimacy of the occupations and contribute to political polarization within Cuba and Puerto Rico by making schooling a key arena for debates about the intersection of secularism, nationalism, and cultural identity—including religious identity.

The "School Question" on the Eve of 1898

The United States occupations in Cuba and Puerto Rico would institute comprehensive policies that aimed to make free public education a universal right but also allowed the exercise of the individual right of conscience to choose religious schooling so long as it was privately funded. This reflected the social consensus in the late nineteenth-century United States where a system of public education had developed organically at the municipal and state level over the course of the century. Reformers led a push for common schools as an alternative to the patchwork of parochial schools that had characterized education in the early republic. These common schools frequently included religious instruction and Bible reading that reflected the Protestantism of the majority of Americans. As the number of Catholics sharply increased by the mid-nineteenth century as a result of immigration, the implicitly Protestant character of public education led to conflict over the issues of Bible reading and public funding for schools.[7] Events such as the anti-Catholic riots in Boston in the 1830s that led to the burning of a school, or the Bible riots in Philadelphia during the 1840s, in which mobs burned Catholic churches as a response to Catholics' demands that their children be excused from reading the King James Version of the Bible, suggest the intensity of "the school question." In the post-Civil War period, a series of court cases and proposed amendments to the United States Constitution attempted to resolve the question of the separation of church and state that came from the Establishment Clause as it applied to education. The two key issues were whether religious instruction would be permitted in schools and whether parochial schools could receive public funding. The Catholic hierarchy in the US had responded to the violence of the 1840s by encouraging dioceses to found parochial schools in which Catholic children would not be obliged to receive a Protestant-inflected education. The "school question" reached a peak of intensity in the 1870s when legislators made several proposals to amend the Constitution—typically described with the umbrella term "Blaine Amendment," after Representative James Blaine, who had made the initial proposal—to prohibit the use of public funds for parochial schools. At the national level, this failed to pass although it

Aida Negrón de Montilla, *La Americanización en Puerto Rico y el Sistema de Instrucción Pública 1900–1930* (San Juan: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1976); Georgia Tzortzaki, "Los colegios católicos en La Habana: Compromiso social y función educativa (1902–1952)" (PhD diss., Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2019).

[7]Benjamin Justice and Colin Macleod, *Have a Little Faith: Religion, Democracy, and the American Public School* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 65–68.

would be followed by numerous state and local laws that imitated its provisions.[8] By the end of the nineteenth century, the consensus was that parochial schools would not receive public funding, although religious groups have continued up until the present to bring legal and political challenges to this status quo.

The anti-Catholicism of the Protestant majority was a hallmark of early American culture that went beyond bigotry. As Elizabeth Fenton has argued, anti-Catholicism fundamentally shaped the American understanding of liberal democracy itself. The Protestant belief in the individual's direct relationship to God produced a key tenet of political thought: religious faith and practice were matters of private conscience that the state was obliged to recognize as such. To be free meant to think and choose freely and to escape the bonds of blind obedience and ignorance. Catholicism, with its mediation of faith through the hierarchy of the Church and its historically close relationships to monarchical, absolutist states, seemed to many Protestant Americans the antithesis of liberty. The struggle for power in the Americas between the Spanish, French, Portuguese, and British empires influenced this understanding. Spain's reputation for cruelty during the conquests of the Caribbean, Mexico, and Peru that were undertaken by Spanish soldiers in league with Catholic priests reinforced anti-Catholic animus.[9] US Americans frequently attributed their differences with Latin Americans to racial characteristics that were inextricable from the differences between the Anglo and Hispanic traditions—including religion.[10]

Such views shaped how many Americans understood the Cuban insurgency against the Spanish empire. The independence wars that began in 1868 and did not end until the decisive intervention of the United States in 1898 attracted widespread popular attention owing in part to a narrative of the Cubans as seeking their own redemption from the oppression of not just Spain but of the established Catholic Church.[11] During the debates in Congress about US intervention into the Cuban conflict in the spring of 1898, many likened the contest between the US and Spain as a potentially providential conflict through which the US could bring civil and religious liberty to an oppressed people.[12] There was some truth to this narrative insofar as Cuban *independentista* leadership included quite a few Masons and Protestants. Protestantism had first gained a foothold in Cuba because of the efforts of Cubans who had converted while living as exiles in Tampa and Key West.

[8]Steven K. Green, *The Bible, the School, and the Constitution: The Clash That Shaped Modern Church-State Doctrine* (New York: Oxford, 2012), 179–223.

[9]Elizabeth Fenton, *Religious Liberties: Anti-Catholicism and Liberal Democracy in Nineteenth-Century U.S. Literature and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3–15.

[10]Frederick B. Pike, *The United States and Latin America: Myths and Stereotypes of Civilization and Nature* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 76–80. In the *Downes v. Bidwell* decision (1901), one of the so-called Insular Cases through which the US Supreme Court worked out the legal status of Puerto Rico in relation to the United States, one of the justices explicitly linked the question of race and culture by describing Puerto Ricansas "inhabited by alien races, differing from us in religion, customs, laws . . ." See Ediberto Román, *Citizenship and Its Exclusions* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 102.

[11]Pike, *The United States and Latin America*, 176.

[12]Paul T. McCartney, "Religion, the Spanish-American War, and the Idea of American Mission," *Journal of Church and State* 54, no. 2 (Spring 2012), 257–78.

Spanish authorities frequently assumed that Protestant Cubans supported the cause of independence.[13]

More broadly, liberals in both Cuban and Puerto Rican colonial society were anticlerical. During a period when liberals had power in Spain in the early nineteenth century, the Catholic Church in Cuba was stripped of much of its property—an event that weakened its power and contributed to the dismal state of religious life at the parish level.[14] The effects of Spanish liberal reforms for the colonies were often contradictory. In 1842, Spain approved a first "Ley General de Instrucción Pública para las Islas de Cuba y Puerto Rico [General Law of Public Education for the Islands of Cuba and Puerto Rico]" that established some state-supported public schooling but, at the same time, made all schooling subject to Church supervision and took power away from local, Creole-run institutions that had been organizing free schools as a counterweight to parochial ones. The suspicions of the Spanish colonial government about Cuban loyalties limited the extent to which it was willing to expand public education and led it to rely on the Church to police any teaching that fomented secularism, as this was equated with incipient Cuban nationalism.[15] Given the Church's control over both public and private education and that the limited school system was in shambles by the end of thirty years of wars, many Cubans had come to see the established Church as an obstacle to independence and to social progress and to believe in the argument made by José Martí, the emblematic father of Cuban nationalism—that "un pueblo instruido será siempre fuerte y libre."[16] The conflict with Spain was muted in Puerto Rico by comparison with the three brutal wars for independence in Cuba, but a similar dynamic existed as far as attitudes toward the Church on the part of Puerto Rican liberals. They understood it as one of the bulwarks of Spanish colonialism and resented its influence over education and freedom of expression. Leading Puerto Rican educator and philosopher Eugenio María de Hostos, who like Martí had traveled widely in Spain, the United States, and Latin America, described this relationship in broad terms, characterizing the Spanish American colonies as "mentalmente dominada y esclavizada por un régimen intellectual que no se cuida de otra cosa que de llenar a toda costa hasta saciarlo o enfermar el entendimiento de la adolescencia."[17] Although a period of

[13]Luis Martínez-Fernández, *Protestantism and Political Conflict in the Nineteenth-Century Hispanic Caribbean* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 130–61; James A. Baer, "God and the Nation: Protestants, Patriotism and Pride in Cuba, 1890–1906," *International Journal of Cuban Studies* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2016), 74–96.

[14]John C. Super, "Interpretations of Church and State in Cuba," *Catholic Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (July 2003), 511–29.

[15]Yoel Cordoví Núñez and Dayana Murguia Méndez, "La regulación de la enseñanza privada en Cuba. Principales proyectos, normativas y polémicas," *Historia Caribe* 12, no. 30 (January-June 2017), 215–19.

[16]Translation (by author): "An educated people will always be strong and free." José Martí, "Educación popular," reprinted in Herminio Almendrez Ibáñez, *José Martí: Ideario Pedagógico* (Havana: Editorial Pueblo y Educación, 2021), 163; Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban*, 56.

[17]Translation (by author): "mentally dominated and enslaved by an intellectual regime that cares for nothing but at any cost to sicken and satiate the youthful understanding [of the colonized]. Hostos quoted in Ángel R. Villarini, "La enseñanza orientada al desarrollo del pensamiento según Eugenio María de Hostos," in *Hostos: Sentido y proyección de su obra en América. Ponencias presentadas en el Primer Encuentro Internacional sobre el Pensamiento de Eugenio María de Hostos, celebrado en Puerto Rico del*

liberalism in Spain had led to the extension of the right of religious toleration in Puerto Rico by the late nineteenth century, as well as to a short-lived period of political autonomy just before the US invasion and occupation, education remained primarily the province of the elite classes.[18]

Within the United States, if such critiques of Catholic influence seemed evidence that the peoples of the islands would embrace the separation of church and state, the American Catholic press expressed dismay at the suggestion that the struggle against Spain was a kind of religious war in which victory would mean the redemption of Cubans and Puerto Ricans as Protestants. The general press commonly framed the conflict in such terms. An article in the *Sioux City Journal*, for instance, criticized a Catholic publication for arguing that the US should not grab the Philippines and Puerto Rico in addition to Cuba by stating that those islands had "fallen to our Christian hands" and there could be no question of returning them to Spain.[19] Catholic writers resisted the suggestion that the Church endorsed and was even responsible for the oppression that Cubans suffered. Even so, as US involvement in the war became increasingly likely, the Catholic press became as jingoistic as the press at large.[20] At times, Irish Catholics even likened the relationship of Cuba to Spain with that of Ireland to Great Britain, although not without ambivalence.[21] None of this spared American Catholics questions about their loyalty to their country as war approached. Pope Leo XIII's decision to send Archbishop John Ireland of St. Paul on a last-minute mission to attempt to persuade President McKinley—a personal friend of Ireland's—and several congressmen to continue talks with Spain and avoid war was poorly received by the American press. It seemed to confirm anti-Catholic suspicions that the Vatican supported Spain and that the American hierarchy could not be trusted. Archbishop Ireland had feared that outcome but had hoped his reputation as a staunch Americanist among Catholic leaders and his service as a chaplain during the Civil War would lend him sufficient credibility. Ireland understood that the loyalty of US Catholics would be suspect if war broke out.[22] When it did, the Catholic press and pulpit repeatedly assured their audiences

2 al 7 de abril de 1989 (San Juan: Instituto de Estudios Hostianos; Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1995), 312.

[18]Samuel Silva Gotay, *Catolicismo y política en Puerto Rico: Bajo España y Estados Unidos: Siglos XIX y XX* (San Juan: Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2005), 177–201.

[19]"[Catholic; Cuba; Porto Rico]," *Sioux City Journal* (Sioux City, Iowa), November 12, 1898, 10, available at *Readex: America's Historical Newspapers*. For an overview of the providentialism of the US press in regard to the war, see Samuel Silva Gotay, *Protestantismo y política en Puerto Rico, 1898–1930: hacia una historia del protestantismo evangélico en Puerto Rico* (San Juan: La Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1997), 75–81.

[20]Frank T. Reuter, *Catholic Influence on American Colonial Policies, 1898–1904* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967), i-20; Scott Wright, "'The Northwestern Chronicle' and the Spanish-American War: American Catholic Attitudes regarding the 'Splendid Little War,'" *American Catholic Studies* 116, no. 4 (Winter 2005), 55–68.

[21]Ryan D. Dye, "Irish-American Ambivalence toward the Spanish-American War," *New Hibernia Review / Iris Éireannach Nua* 11, no. 3 (Autumn 2007), 98–113.

[22]John Offner, "Washington Mission: Archbishop Ireland on the Eve of the Spanish-American War," *Catholic Historical Review* 73, no. 4 (Oct. 1987), 563–64.

that their religion did not contradict their patriotism, and highlighted the extent of Catholic support for the war effort.[23]

Once the war ended, the US Catholic hierarchy endorsed the imposition of a separation of church and state in both Cuba and Puerto Rico. Nevertheless, during the occupations, US Catholics would press their government on the question of whether certain limits were legitimate in majority Catholic societies such as the new insular possessions. A Methodist newspaper commented on this dynamic in a piece aptly titled "Old Issues in Newer Forms." Schooling was one. The editorial predicted that the Catholic Church in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines would immediately take advantage of the new arrangements imposed by the Americans to begin a campaign of parochial school building as had happened in the United States. The new possessions would thus be deprived of the salutary effects of a system modeled on "the American public school, with its old-time Bible readings." This outcome would be the fault of "Jews, Unitarians, indifferentists, and a whole body of careless Americans who aided the Romanists to dislocate our school system so fatally."[24] "The school question" would reappear in the context of imperialism.

Cuba

Establishing a system of public education for Cuba was a centerpiece of the occupation government's efforts. This was particularly so under the command of Leonard Wood, who served first as military governor of Santiago de Cuba at the end of the war and later as the island's military governor from December 1899 through May 1902, when Cuba became an independent republic. He devoted some 20 percent of the entire occupation budget to the task, and the results were impressive. In the last years of the war, most schools on the island had ceased to function and had in any case never enrolled more than 16 percent of Cuban children. At the end of Wood's tenure as military governor in 1902, some 45 percent of all children were enrolled in public schools.[25]

The public system for Cuba was modeled on that of Ohio and included a comprehensive examination system for prospective teachers, control by local school boards, and a curriculum that looked much like that of US schools, with the exception that Cuban history was included alongside American history. Although some effort was made during the occupation to have English taught as a subject in public primary schools and to train Cuban teachers in English, unlike in the case of Puerto Rico, ambitious plans for bilingual education came to little owing to Cuban opposition. Wood recognized that to bring in English-speaking teachers to Cuba "would probably have resulted in a great deal of suspicion and bad feeling."[26] Spanish remained the language of instruction. The public system was also entirely non-sectarian. An initial plan for reshaping education by a new school board in Santiago appointed by Wood

[23]Reuter, *Catholic Influence*, 5–12.

[24]"Old Issues in Newer Forms," *Northwestern Christian Advocate* (Chicago, Illinois), May 10, 1899, 4.

[25]Erwin H. Epstein, "The Peril of Paternalism: The Imposition of Education on Cuba by the United States," *American Journal of Education*, 96, no. 1 (Nov. 1987), 4, 8–9.

[26]Wood quoted in Laurie Johnston, "*Por la Escuela Cubana en Cuba Libre:* Themes in the History of Primary and Secondary Education in Cuba, 1899–1958" (PhD diss., University College of London, 1996), 25; Marial Iglesias Utset, *A Cultural History of Cuba during the U.S. Occupation, 1898–1902*, trans. Russ Davidson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 71–75.

had stated that members of religious orders would be barred from public school teaching.[27] On the national level, however, religion is mentioned nowhere in the detailed circulars that established the legal basis for the school system in Cuba, not even in the one that states that private schools may be established as long as they are first approved by the superintendent of public schools.[28] These policies would be continued under the original Cuban Constitution of 1902 that established the country as an independent republic—albeit one that was forced to accept significant American tutelage as a condition of its independence. Article 26 of the new constitution guaranteed freedom of religion and the separation of church and state, while Article 31 declared that primary education would be compulsory and gratuitous and secondary and higher education would be regulated by the state. Article 31 continued, "However, all persons may, without restriction, study or teach any science, art or profession, and found and maintain establishments of education and instruction."[29] The first administration of the new Cuban Republic had close ties to the United States. It was led by President Tomás Estrada Palma, sometimes known as the schoolmaster president for the years that he had spent in the United States running a boarding school that served the children of fellow Cubans. Estrada Palma was a converted Protestant and this religious affiliation recommended him to US authorities concerned about the transfer of power over the island to Cubans.[30]

These decisions—first by the occupation and then under the Republic—to establish a broad and deep system of public schooling while still permitting the establishment of private schools responded to the stated commitment of the independence movement's leaders to the principle of a separation of church and state and also to the broader American understanding of religious freedom as a private right. Some American Catholics did not see it this way. They, along with other minority religious groups in the US, largely accepted the need for non-sectarian schools given the realities of religious pluralism, but still decried what they saw as the state's imposition of godlessness in public schools. Given that Cuba, like the other new insular possessions, was a majority Catholic country, some American Catholics reasoned that there was no need to impose the American accommodation of religious pluralism that in their view claimed to be non-sectarian, but in reality favored Protestantism. While this argument would erupt on a grand scale a few years later during the occupation of the Philippines, in what Judith Raftery has called "the textbook wars," in Cuba the primary expression of this controversy came in response to the news that one thousand Cuban teachers would be sent to a summer normal school at Harvard University in 1900.[31]

[27]Mario John Minichino, "In Our Image: The Attempted Reshaping of the Cuban Educational System by the United States Government, 1898–1912" (PhD diss., University of South Florida, 2014), 177, https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=6471&context=etd.

[28]"Private Education," Circular No. 4, Military Government of Cuba, Headquarters, Department of Cuba (Havana, January 6, 1902), 5, in General Classified Files, Bureau of Insular Affairs, Container 69, Record Group 365, National Archives of the United States, College Park, MD.

[29]"Constitution of the Republic of Cuba," printed in Leonard Wood, *Civil Report of the Military Governor of Cuba*, vol. 2 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902), 229.

[30]Yaremko, *U.S. Protestant Missions in Cuba*, 31–32.

[31]Judith Raftery, "Textbook Wars: Governor-General James Francis Smith and the Protestant-Catholic Conflict in Public Education in the Philippines, 1904–1907," *History of Education Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (Summer 1998), 143–64.

Alexis Frye, a Harvard alum whom Wood appointed as superintendent of schools in Cuba, organized the trip. While Frye had made clear in public statements that "he had not an ounce of denomination in himself" and even warned Protestants not to establish too many sectarian schools in Cuba, American Catholics equated the trip to Harvard with an attempt to inculcate Protestant values into the future public school teachers of Cuba.[32] After a pressure campaign in the Catholic press, the trip's organizers, including Harvard's president, arranged for the teachers to be able to attend Catholic mass throughout the summer and for Catholic families and sisters at a convent to house the visiting teachers. Despite this success, as the controversy over what seemed like extensive Protestant influence over public schools in the Philippines heated up, the American Catholic press continued to remark negatively on the occupation government's ban on any religious instruction in Cuban public schools.[33]

For their part, Protestant missionary groups enthusiastically sought to enact the long-hoped-for redemption of Cuba. The US victory over Spain seemed proof positive of the workings of providence. The influential Congregationalist minister and author Lyman Abbott made direct connections between religious and social factors in the triumph: "The conflict at Manila and that at Santiago were between the Public School and the Inquisition; between a century which teaches the common people to think, and one which forbids them to think."[34] In one appeal in a New York newspaper in late 1898, a missionary described the hopefulness of Cubans who saw that "their religious and civil liberty is at hand." He urged Americans to send bibles to Cuba by the thousands but also encouraged the establishment of free public schools so that Cubans could learn English, which would facilitate their ability to read the Gospel.[35] More than a few such groups wrote to describe their plans to establish schools and to petition the occupation government for assistance, but to no avail. The government response was simply to thank them for sharing the information and to sidestep the question of assistance.[36] For the most part, and unlike what was happening in Puerto Rico, occupation officials in Cuba pointedly sought to avoid any appearance of favoring Protestantism or disrespecting Catholicism. This tendency was marked enough for Protestant missionaries to complain about it. One Southern Baptist wrote home to the Mission Board that "the military leaders here pander to Romanism and have frequently treated gospel workers with contempt."[37] A key reason for this difference may be related to the fact that in Cuba, the occupation feared renewed violence and social conflict from Cuban veterans of the final independence war, many of whom were not fully demobilized until April

[32]"School Conditions in Cuba," *Cambridge Tribune (Boston, MA)*, April 21, 1900, 6.

[33]Reuter, *Catholic Influence*, 50–51, 113.

[34]Lyman Abbott, "Santiago," *Outlook*, July 9, 1898, quoted in Benjamin J. Wetzel, "Onward Christian Soldiers: Lyman Abbott's Justification of the Spanish-American War," *Journal of Church and State* 54, no. 3 (July 2012), 415.

[35]S. T. Willis, "Cuba as a Mission Field," *New York Observer*, December 29, 1898, 874.

[36]See, for instance, the letters to and from the Cuban American League in December of 1898 in General Classified Files, Bureau of Insular Affairs, Container 4, Record Group 365, National Archives of the United States, College Park, MD.

[37]Quoted in Martínez-Fernández, *Protestantism and Political Conflict*, 164.

of 1899 and who resented their exclusion from the settlement of the war. In one of the ironies of the occupation, US military officials came to favor the continued presence of Spaniards in municipal government roles and the maintenance of other conservative social forces, such as the Church.[38]

Despite this lack of official support by the occupation, schools run by US Protestant missionary groups at first spread at a phenomenal pace with so much competition that representatives of the different denominations met to divide the island into zones within which they would confine their efforts. Most Cuban cities and towns had a Protestant missionary school in place by the 1920s.[39] The reality of the clause that allowed for private schools with next to no oversight or regulation made private, parochial education a viable option for Cubans of means, and even for some of little means in the case of religious schools that were supported by foreign donors. Furthermore, under the Cuban Republic, Protestant mission schools frequently received tacit support from pro-American administrations that was signaled by, among other things, the fact that some Cuban presidents sent their own children there.[40]

The education policies of the occupation and subsequent civil government may have seemed to at least tacitly favor Protestantism by making public schools nonsectarian and permitting the establishment of an extensive network of Protestant missionary schools, but American Catholics correctly observed that Cuba remained a majority Catholic country and that many families continued to desire Catholic religious education for their children. Moreover, given the loss of power that necessarily followed from the disestablishment of the Church, fomenting Catholicism through education became a priority for a Church that no longer had state support and faced hostility from some social sectors because of its previous association with Spanish colonialism. If the American policy and subsequent Cuban constitution permitted private Protestant schools, they equally permitted private Catholic schools.

While a number of Catholic teaching orders and congregations already had a presence in Cuba since the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, many new ones arrived in the early twentieth century, often at the invitation of the Cuban hierarchy, to establish schools. Some of the foreign religious who entered Cuba post-1898 were from the US, but the large majority were Europeans. Some of this influx was propelled by "push" factors as much as by "pull" factors—the "school question" had also roiled European societies grappling with debates over liberalism. For instance, French laws in 1905 and 1907 that laicized schooling led to the closure of thousands of Catholic schools and the out-migration of much of the country's largest teaching congregation, the Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools—quite a few of whom were redeployed to Cuba where they soon developed a large and prestigious network of schools.[41] Likewise, from the 1910s through the 1930s, anticlericalism in Spain and

[38]Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886–1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), pp. 91–116.

[39]Louis A. Pérez Jr., *Essays on Cuban History: Historiography and Research* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1994), 53–72.

[40]Yaremko, *U.S. Protestant Missions in Cuba*, 71–73.

[41]Ângelo Ezequiel Leubet, Evaldo Luis Pauly, and Valdir Leonardo da Silva, "Jean-Baptiste de La Salle's Contributions to the Formation of the Modern School," *Revista Brasileña de Historia de la Educación* 16,

Mexico that sometimes led to violence pushed religious out of those countries. Many went to Cuban schools run by their orders or congregations.[42] In this sense, Cuba became a mission field not only for Protestants who came primarily from the United States but also for Catholic religious.

By the end of the first American occupation in 1902, private schools, both lay and religious, already accounted for 7 percent of the total in Cuba, and by the 1950s, had grown to 15 percent. They frequently had far higher rates of matriculation and attendance than did the public schools that were plagued by truancy.[43] During the first occupation, new Protestant schools likely accounted for more of the total than did Catholics, but by the 1910s Catholic schools outstripped the Protestant offerings. By 1949, 28 percent of all children enrolled in a private primary school attended a Catholic one, compared with a little over 6 percent enrolled in Protestant schools.[44] Catholic orders bent on establishing new schools perceived the presence of a Protestant school in a town or neighborhood as their most important competition and sometimes planned new schools with the object of undermining existing or potential Protestant schools. Some Catholic religious noted with concern a chief attraction of the Protestant schools—their English language offerings—but declared themselves prepared to fight to attract students.[45] By some measures, as Georgia Tzortzaki has shown, the Catholic schools also outcompeted the public system. While public primary schools were far more widespread than private options, their students frequently did not persist past the first two grades, whereas Catholic school students usually completed primary school. At the level of secondary education, private schools, of which Catholic schools were the majority, surpassed public high schools in both number and matriculations. In Havana, the largest city, three times as many students were in private secondary schools as public.[46]

Without question, differences in social class—that were also markedly racialized as Cuban elites were predominantly White—helped to explain the strength of the private Catholic system. Although the system featured charity schools and scholarship students, many of its students paid at least some tuition and at a minimum were from families who could afford to keep them in school rather than sending them to work. These class differences were also reflected in a sharp rural-urban divide where new Catholic schools were established in expanding Cuban cities that were home to the country's growing middle class.[47] The class dynamic between private

no. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 2016), 88–89; Alfredo A. Morales, *Itinerario de los Hermanos de La Salle en el Distrito de las Antillas* (Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic: Amigos del Hogar, 1978).

[42]Georgia Tzortzaki, "La revolución mexicana como huella ideológica en el pensamiento anticlerical cubano (1914–1934)," in Damián A. González et al., *Lost in Translation? Actas del XXIII Congreso de la Asociación de Historia Contemporánea* (Cuenca, Spain: Universidad Castilla-La Mancha, 2017), 2476–79.

[43]Epstein, "The Peril of Paternalism," 2.

[44]Tzortzaki, "Los colegios católicos en La Habana," 219. For a complete overview of Catholic schools established in Cuba from the colonial era through 1961, see Teresa Fernández Soneira, *Cuba: Historia de la educación católica, 1582–1961* (Miami: Ediciones Universales, 1997).

[45]Tzortzaki, "Los colegios católicos en La Habana," 228.

[46]Tzortzaki, "Los colegios católicos en La Habana," 215–16.

[47]Tzortzaki, "Los colegios católicos en La Habana," 228–30. Private school students were largely White, especially at the most prestigious schools, and it was widely recognized that one reason wealthy families chose private education was to avoid the racial integration of the public school system. However, while

and public schools where the private schools attracted students of a higher social class became apparent early on. When the United States intervened a second time in Cuba in 1906 and remained for three years as an occupying power, Lincoln de Zayas, the acting secretary of public instruction, was deeply troubled by the state of public schools. Although he cited a number of problems that affected public education—not least of which was the civil war that had provoked a second intervention—he remarked upon how well subscribed the Catholic schools were. He decried the lack of regulatory power the state had over private education but admitted that "it would be idle to charge the religious schools in Cuba of negligence or incompetency; the schools established and maintained by the Roman Catholic Church are among the very best." He concluded that "unless something be done to introduce God, not within the limits of any sect, but in His grand and glorious concept of Our Father in Heaven, the public schools of Cuba will not attract the children of our most distinguished families."[48] The deepening split between public and private schools was, as Zayas implied, often class-based, but it also spoke to different political visions within Cuba and Cuban understandings of the relationship between religion and nationalism.

Class differences do not explain the long-term failure of Protestant schools to outcompete the newly established Catholics. A 1914 article in the American *Catholic World* reviewed the many supports that Protestantism had had in Cuba across two occupations and ongoing dominance by the United States, and the author crowed with delight over his finding that the religion had made barely a dent in Cuban Catholicism. This was an exaggeration—Protestantism had a permanent and significant foothold in Cuba—but the author was right to point out that even those Cubans who attended the Protestant schools that persisted often remained Catholic.[49] As successful as Protestants were early on at attracting Cubans to their schools, Protestantism in Cuba suffered from the fact that it remained paternalistic, with most congregations continuing to be led by American-born pastors and employing American forms of worship through the middle of the century.[50] Catholicism, on the other hand, was not only the traditional religion of the island, but in the face of American anti-Catholic attitudes that Cubans had the opportunity to experience firsthand as US influence continued to grow, adherence to Catholicism had at least some potential to serve the purposes of cultural nationalism.[51]

Afro-Cubans had better access to public schools, they sometimes faced informal exclusion or had little access to schools due to the largely White neighborhoods where they were built. For a case study, see Bonnie A. Lucero, "The Great Equalizer? Education, Racial Exclusion, and the Transition from Colony to Republic in Cienfuegos, Cuba," *Cuban Studies* 49, no. 1 (2020), 153–73.

[48]Lincoln de Zayas, "Report from the Period from September 29, 1906 to November 1, 1907," in Charles E. Magoon, *Republic of Cuba: Report of Provisional Administration from Oct. 13th, 1906 to December 1st, 1907* (Havana: Rambla and Bouza Printers, 1908), 328, 348.

[49]Richard Aumerle Maher, "Protestantism in Cuba," *Catholic World* 100 (Nov. 1914), 206–14.

[50]For a comprehensive history of Protestantism in Cuba and the complicated relationship between Americans and Cuban Protestants, see James A. Baer, *A Social History of Cuba's Protestants: God and the Nation* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019).

[51]Amílcar Antonio Barreto, "Enlightened Tolerance or Cultural Capitulation? Contesting Notions of American Identity," in *Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American State*, ed. Alfred W. McCoy and Francisco A. Scarano (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 147–48;

This possibility was tempered by cultural memories that associated the Church with Spanish imperialism and that saw independence as compromised by the United States intervention. Another potent strain of Cuban nationalism rejected both Catholicism and Protestantism as foreign influences that hindered Cuban self-determination. This perspective was reinforced by the fact that in the early decades of the twentieth century, a majority of the teaching religious were foreign born.[52] This more militantly secular nationalist perspective expressed itself in debates over what should be the nature of education in the modern, independent country that nationalists aspired for Cuba to become. By the mid-1910s, liberal nationalists who had supported independence (versus autonomy or annexation to the US), opposed the influence of the Church, and saw free, universal public education as the key means of national progress were sounding the alarm that private schools fostered social divisions and undermined Cuban patriotism. Laurie Johnston has written of this movement:

> In keeping with the beliefs of the nineteenth century intellectuals who advocated Cuba Libre, the intellectuals and educationalists of republican Cuba maintained that an independent, democratic republic could not exist without a strong public educational system. Support for public education was equated with nationalism, its promotion a patriotic duty.[53]

This concern over schooling stemmed from the obvious failures of the public system where dropout rates were high, but also from the fractured political landscape of post-independence Cuba where postwar economic problems, American interventionism, and tensions between liberals and conservatives over the future of the new republic had resulted in a second American occupation, regional violence, racial conflict and repression of Afro-Cubans, splintered political parties, and increasing suspicions about the validity of elections.

In July of 1915, Ismael Clark, at the time an inspector of primary school instruction, took this debate to the Cuban public when he published an essay titled "El problema religioso." In it, he first made clear that he referred specifically to Catholicism as the problematic religion. He next warned that the growing power of the Church was a threat to civil society in Cuba because it was related to "[el] más delicado de nuestros problemas . . . que debe merecer toda la atención de quienes verdaderamente se preocupen por la salud de la patria y su engrandecimiento y consolidación: el problema educativo."[54] Clark calculated that at least 5,840 religious had arrived since 1902, and

Alan McPherson, "Anti-Americanism in Latin America," in *Anti-Americanism: History, Causes, Themes*, vol. 3, *Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Brendan O'Connor (Oxford: Greenwood Press, 2007), 77–87; Pike, *The United States and Latin America*, 75–86, 193–201; Ernst B. Haas, *Nationalism, Liberalism, and Progress: The Dismal Fate of New Nations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 226–28.

[52]Tzortzaki, "Los colegios católicos en La Habana," 36–37. For a similar case in which the policies of the US occupation in regard to religion had contradictory effects on the development of competing Cuban nationalisms, see Enid Lynette Logan, "The 1899 Cuban Marriage Law Controversy: Church, State and Empire in the Crucible of Nation," *Journal of Social History* 42, no. 2 (Winter 2008), 469–94.

[53]Johnston, "*Por la Escuela Cubana en Cuba Libre*," 50.

[54]Translation (by the author): "the most delicate of our problems . . . that should merit the attention of those who truly care about the health of our country and its growth and consolidation: the education problem."

made the point that most of these were destined to become teachers at schools where the children of the elites would study. In Clark's view, these religious "no son cubanos, ni sienten amor por nuestros grandes hombres, ni quieren a nuestra tierra, ni conocen nuestra historia."[55] This inevitably results, he argued, in an inability to engender love of country in Cuban students, many of whom would make up the country's governing class. Clark was part of a group of reformers that included leading pedagogues and academics. They created the Fundación Luz Caballero in 1915 as a forum and advocacy group for Cuban public education. Clark gave a speech at its May inauguration that was the basis for the July article.[56] The group diagnosed the political and economic woes of the young Cuban Republic, which included significant corruption, as stemming from a bifurcated education system where the popular classes attended often underfunded and poorly run public schools while the well-off went to elite private schools where they were taught by conservative, foreign-born religious. Arturo Montori, professor at the University of Havana's Normal School, dubbed this phenomenon "antinacionalismo pedagógico."[57] While over time the Cuban left would become increasingly critical of American cultural influence, Montori, in a lengthy 1920 article on "El problema de la educación nacional," described the public school system imposed during the US occupation as one "según las más adelantadas inspiraciones pedagógicas" and regretted that after Cuba's 1902 independence, it had fallen into "desorganización y decadencia."[58] Another critical voice came from the Afro-Cuban community. Leaders of the Partido Independiente de Color (Independent Party of [People of] Color) denounced private schools for discriminating against Black students.[59]

In a context of American neocolonial influence, and frequently direct interference, such concerns led to a political movement to require the government to regulate private schools and make them more nationally oriented. The reformers argued that private schools should be Cubanized by requiring them to employ Cuban-born directors, provide a patriotic education that emphasized Cuban history and culture, and align their curricula with that of the public system. Such arguments brought indignant responses from the Cuban Catholic press. In an essay from 1919, a writer posed the rhetorical question, "¿No ungió la religión cristiana las primeras armas levantadas en Bayamo por la independencia de Cuba y no se alzaban preces católicas ante la tumba de Maceo y de todos los grandes libertadores de Cuba?"[60]

Ismael Clark, "El problema religioso [The Religious Problem]," *Cuba Contemporánea* 8, no. 3 (July 1915), 210. The article also appeared in the major national newspaper *Heraldo de Cuba*, on July 9, 1915.

[55]Translation (by the author): "are not Cuban and love neither our great men or our country, nor do they know our history." Clark, "El problema religioso," 213.

[56]León Primelles, *Crónica Cubana, 1915–1918* (Havana: Editorial Lex, 1955), 87–88, accessed at https://archive.org/stream/LeonPrimellesCronicaCubana191518T1/Leon_Primelles_-_Cronica_cubana_1915-18_t_1_djvu.txt.

[57]Translation (by the autor): "pedagogical anti-nationalism." Tzortzaki, "Los colegios católicos en La Habana," 51

[58]Translation (by the author): "based on the most advanced pedagogical thought," "disorganization and decadence." Arturo Montori, "El problema de la educación nacional [The Problem of National Education]," *Cuba Contemporánea* 14, no. 96 (Dec. 1920), 330.

[59]Johnston, "*Por la Escuela Cubana en Cuba Libre*," 68–69.

[60]Translation (by the author): "Did not the Christian religion anoint the first arms raised in Bayamo for the independence of Cuba and were not Catholic prayers raised at the tomb of Maceo and of all the great

Catholic schools soon began to emphasize overtly Cuban patriotism as a core part of their identity by, for example, incorporating ceremonies celebrating the flag, the singing of the national anthem, the use of patriotic symbolism such as busts of José Martí, and student participation in public events commemorating patriotic anniversaries. While Protestant schools in Cuba made similar efforts to define themselves within Cuban patriotism, they were hampered by their much closer association to the United States.[61]

This proactive response to the reformers' criticism contributed to successful efforts to defeat proposals, first put forward in 1917, to more closely regulate private schools, but the proposals emerged again in the 1930s as a decade of economic turmoil revealed the extent of Cuba's dependence on the United States, and extreme political conflict led to public schools being shut down for long periods. This period also led to an increasingly radical, nationalist, anti-imperialist left. In regard to education, these tendencies would be reflected in Cuba's new constitution of 1940. It continued to protect the right of private education and religious instruction but gave the government the right to regulate private schools and required that instructors of Cuban history, geography, and culture be Cuban-born. Associated legislation proposed by Juan Marinello, a member of the Communist Party, that would have enforced these clauses provoked a bitter fight.[62] By 1945, when the efforts of organized groups that represented Catholic students, teachers, and schools had effectively stalled this legislation, it was clear that at least in the area of education, Catholicism in Cuba had become a significant force—but not an uncontested one.[63] The conflict was not resolved until the period of the Cuban Revolution when Fidel Castro, after a series of increasingly sharp confrontations with the Catholic Church—many of which took place at Catholic schools—nationalized all schooling in an announcement on May 1, 1961, and subsequently expropriated the land and buildings of private schools on the island. This led to an exodus of most teaching religious and thus ended the influence of both Catholic and Protestant private schools in Cuba.[64]

Puerto Rico

Unlike in Cuba, the United States did not have to plan for a transition to independence for Puerto Rico. This expectation of an ongoing colonial relationship affected the planning and implementation of US-led education reforms. From the beginning, the maintenance of the island as a colony was justified by the Puerto Ricans' supposed need for tutelage. Noting the widespread poverty, high rates of illiteracy, and

liberators of Cuba?" Tzortzaki, "Los colegios católicos en La Habana," 98; Laurie Johnston, "Cuban Nationalism and Responses to Private Education in Cuba, 1902–1958," in *Ideologues and Ideologies in Latin America*, ed. Will Fowler (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 31–34.

[61]Tzortzaki, "Los colegios católicos en La Habana," 93–154.

[62]Tzortzaki, "Los colegios católicos en La Habana," 27–44; Rolando Buenavilla Recio et al., *Historia de la pedogogía en Cuba* (La Habana: Editorial Pueblo y Educación, 1995), 59–75.

[63]Katia Figueredo Cabrera, "La polémica educacional de los años 40 en Cuba," *En Revista Temas. Cultura, ideología y Sociedad* 56 (October-December 2008), 184–95.

[64]Super, "Interpretations of Church and State in Cuba," 525–27. See also Lisa Jarvinen and Conrad Gleber, "Leaving Cuba," Revolution, Diaspora and Return: The Journey of the Cuban De La Salle Brothers, https://www.revolution-diaspora-return.com/.

the previous misrule by Spain, many Americans considered the next generation of Puerto Ricans the only hope. As one US newspaper expressed it, "[Puerto Ricans] are densely ignorant. . . . The children of these people may be educated so that they will become Americans; it is doubtful that the old will ever become so." G. G. Groff, the military occupation's official in charge of public health, and later commissioner of education, concluded in an early report that "the slow work of education and evolution only will redeem the people."[65]

Many Americans had little doubt that this perceived level of ignorance stemmed from the control of the clergy over schools—a view shared by elite Puerto Rican liberals, although Americans tended to disregard the previous efforts of nineteenth-century reformers.[66] The first set of school laws announced by Guy Henry, the military governor of Puerto Rico, immediately imposed a secular system that excluded religious instruction.[67] The newly appointed superintendent of schools for Puerto Rico, General John Eaton, was convinced that only by disestablishing the Catholic Church could they make progress toward educating Puerto Ricans in the principles of American government. In an early letter to President William McKinley, Eaton wrote that he wished that Puerto Ricans had been

> made to understand that the raising of the American flag meant the enforcement of American principles of government. . . . Then they would have excluded the church catechism from the schools and have refused to pay out of the municipal treasury money for the support of the priesthood. . . . But we are making rapid forward strides—making progress in months that could not be made in years under any other than military rule. As affairs are now moving, we see how education in its broad sense will rapidly make these people know and love American freedoms.[68]

Eaton had served as a general in the Civil War and first won renown as an educator for his postwar work with the Freedmen's Bureau that organized schools for freed slaves in the South. He then became the first United States commissioner of education. He was also a Protestant pastor who had enlisted in the war as a chaplain. By the time of his service in Puerto Rico, he was quite elderly and because of his declining health would soon have to resign, leaving the deputy commissioner, Victor S. Clark, to take over. Clark, too, was a Protestant minister outside of his work for the government.[69]

[65]"How to Make Them Americans through Long Lines of Spreading Palms," *Grand Rapids Herald* (MI), October 8, 1899, 10; G. G. Groff, "Report of Superior Board of Health of Porto Rico," *Military Government of Porto Rico from October 18, 1898 to April 30, 1900* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1901), 175.

[66]Del Moral, *Negotiating Empire*, 31–33; Navarro, *Creating Tropical Yankees*, 3–30.

[67]Alfonso López Yustos, *Historia documental de la educación en Puerto Rico* (Hato Rey, PR: Publicaciones Puertorriqueñas, 1997), 99–103.

[68]Letter, John Eaton to President, San Juan, PR, April 12, 1899, General Classified Files, 1898–1913, Bureau of Insular Affairs, RG 0350, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.

[69]Navarro, *Creating Tropical Yankees*, 44–50; López Yustos, *Historia documental*, 97–99.

That nearly all the administrative and teaching personnel sent to Puerto Rico to reform its education system were Protestants, and that there was a corresponding wave of Protestant missionaries who flooded the country was not lost on Puerto Rican Catholics. To a much greater degree than in Cuba, the imposition of secular, obligatory public education would be understood in Puerto Rico as an Americanizing project that associated Protestantism with American values.[70] This impression was reinforced by the fact that Protestant missionary groups strongly supported the newly created public school system because it mirrored that of the United States and promoted literacy, which was a core value given Protestantism's emphasis on the individual's ability to read the Bible. In Puerto Rico's case, the Americanization of the public schools also meant learning English and becoming literate in that language. The first commissioners of education attempted to make English the primary or exclusive language of instruction by requiring teachers to study it, giving English speakers higher-level positions and salaries, favoring English-language textbooks, and integrating English at all grade levels—although frequent resistance by Puerto Ricans to these plans over time meant that both Spanish and English were used and taught at elementary schools, while secondary education was conducted entirely in English from 1900 through 1942, when Spanish was reintroduced.[71]

Protestant missionaries stepped into the breach and helped advance the occupation and subsequent civilian government's efforts to expand schooling by quickly opening schools in rural areas and poor urban neighborhoods with curricula nearly identical to that of the public system but for the addition of Bible reading.[72] Some Protestant missionary groups later turned over some of their schools to the public school system. This material support was important because the occupation's education budget was underfunded and simply not sufficient to immediately begin providing schooling to all Puerto Rican children, unlike in Cuba where the occupation had extended public schooling much more rapidly and thoroughly.[73] Where school attendance at the end of the first occupation of Cuba in 1902 had grown to 45 percent, in Puerto Rico, this figure was only 30 percent by 1910 and did not pass 40 percent until the 1920s.[74]

Another key difference with Cuba was the role of the American Catholic hierarchy in the transition from Spanish to US control. In Cuba, during the first occupation, the US government had briefly exercised some diplomatic influence over the appointments of a bishop and archbishop considered favorable to US interests, but none ultimately came from the United States.[75] In Puerto Rico, the occupiers were able to secure the appointment of an American bishop, James Blenk, a German-born

[70]Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo, "The Catholic Worldview in the Political Philosophy of Pedro Albizu Campos: The Death Knoll of Puerto Rican Insularity," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 20, no. 4 (Fall 2002), 55–56.

[71]For a succinct overview of the imposition of English on Puerto Rico's public school system, see Solsiree Del Moral, "Language and Empire: Elizabeth Kneipple's Colonial History of Puerto Rico," *Centro Journal* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2019), 60–62. For a detailed account of each commissioner's language policies, see Negrón de Montilla, *La americanización en Puerto Rico y el sistema de instrucción pública*.

[72]Silva Gotay, *Protestantismo y política en Puerto Rico*, 198–99; López Yustos, *Historia documental*, 103–5.

[73]Ellen Walsh, "'Advancing the Kingdom,' Missionaries and Americanization in Puerto Rico, 1898–1930s" (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2008), 111–17.

[74]Victor S. Clark, *Porto Rico and Its Problems* (Silver Springs, MD: Brookings Institution, 1930), 74.

[75]The first bishop named to Cuba post-1898 was Monsignor Donato Sbarretti, an Italian, whose selection disappointed Cuban nationalists who felt that Cubans should fill the highest ecclesiastical positions in

immigrant to the United States who at the time of the War of 1898 was serving a parish in Louisiana. Placide Chapelle, a French immigrant to the United States who had been archbishop of New Orleans until he was selected as the apostolic delegate to Cuba and Puerto Rico in 1898, chose Blenk as his secretary for his new role. This experience led Chapelle to later nominate Blenk for the bishopric of Puerto Rico. Before being named to the position of apostolic delegate, Chapelle had been part of the US delegation to Paris that drafted the treaty ending the war with Spain. He had advised on some of the clauses concerning religion. If on the one hand the US hierarchy of the Church accepted the imposition of a separation of church and state for Puerto Rico as it did in the US, on the other hand, it brought with it all of the memory of the struggles over "the school question" that had provoked the United States' fiercest religious controversy of the nineteenth century. Church leaders would find public support in this struggle from the conservative, traditionally Hispanophile Puerto Rican Catholic press as well as the mainland Catholic press. The most conservative Puerto Rican Catholic publication, *El Ideal Católico*, wrote in March of 1900 that Americanization would be acceptable "si ello 'significa beneficios morales y materiales' para los puertorriqueños."[76] At least at the outset, as Samuel Silva Gotay notes, these alliances would have the odd effect of uniting a sector of Puerto Rican society that had most strongly supported a Catholic Church linked to Spain with the Americanizing tendency of Puerto Rico's new Church hierarchy that intended to undo Spanish influence on the Church and its adherents.[77]

When Blenk began his tenure in July of 1899, one of his first acts was to open a day school for both boys and girls at the episcopate.[78] Nearly as immediately, he and Chapelle protested, first to President McKinley and then to Secretary of War Elihu Root, the publication of the first Insular Commission's report on conditions in Puerto Rico (whose lead author, Henry King Carroll, was a Methodist minister) for its depictions of Puerto Ricans as an inferior people. They further objected to the exclusion of religious instruction from the public schools that were an explicit feature of the new school laws put forward under Eaton and then Clark.[79] During his six years as bishop, Blenk would continue to openly criticize first the military and then the civil government of the island, arguing that Puerto Ricans were deserving of respect, even as he supported a gradual process of Americanization. His advocacy for Puerto Rican culture served as a defense of the Catholicism that he saw as integral to it.[80]

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the country. Marial Iglesias Utset, *A Cultural History of Cuba during the U.S. Occupation, 1898–1902* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 48.

[76]Translation (by the author): "if this would 'mean moral and material benefits' for Puerto Ricans." Silva Gotay, *Catolicismo y política en Puerto Rico*, 338.

[77]Samuel Silva Gotay, *La iglesia católica de Puerto Rico en el proceso político de americanización, 1898–1930* (San Juan, PR: Publicaciones Gaviota, 2012), 147.

[78]Sister Miriam Therese O'Brien, "Puerto Rico's First American Bishop." *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* 91, no. 1/4 (Mar.-Dec. 1980), 14.

[79]López Yustos, *Historia documental*, 103–4.

[80]Gerardo Alberto Hernández Aponte, *La Iglesia Católica en Puerto Rico ante la Invasión de los Estados Únidos de América* (San Juan, PR: Editorial Tiempo Nuevo, 2013), 190–208.

This attitude would soon bring him into a very public conflict over schooling that was emblematic of the larger dynamic. In June of 1900, at a teacher's conference held in San Juan, a Puerto Rican member of the Insular Board of Education stated during his remarks that religious education should be reintroduced into the schools. Another speaker, Dr. Campos Valladares, a Protestant missionary and educator from Brazil, asked Bishop Blenk, who was an invited guest of the conference, if he could reply. In his remarks Campos Valladares stated that Catholicism was the primary cause of illiteracy in Puerto Rico and had had a negative impact on all of South America. According to press accounts, which were numerous both on the island and the mainland, Blenk immediately called the speaker a liar and stated that he would not stand for such descriptions of the Church. A Methodist publication in the United States, *The Christian Advocate*, interpreted this incident as indicative of a situation in which

> Rome . . . pursues her well-known policy. Where she can control under priestly influence institutions supported by public funds she will do so. Otherwise all her power will be exerted against popular education under the auspices of the state. The best friends of Porto Rico and the Porto Ricans themselves are to be congratulated if it shall prove that the public schools of the island are to be administered in accordance with truly American ideals. . . . The training of the Porto Ricans for intelligent citizenship would be greatly hindered [were Rome allowed to interfere].[81]

This incident revealed the extent to which the debates over the school question in the United States had transferred themselves to the colonial context. By contrast with Cuba, Protestant missionary groups saw their work establishing schools in Puerto Rico as an effort undertaken in conjunction with the occupation and succeeding civil governments to establish a public school system that they believed would support Protestant efforts at evangelization. For its part, the Church in Puerto Rico would pursue the same strategy in response to what it saw as a public school system that was not simply secular but actively hostile to Catholicism and sympathetic to Protestantism.[82]

Blenk, as well as his successors (who were likewise from outside the island through the early 1960s when the first Puerto Rican bishops were named), worked with fellow Catholics in Puerto Rico to counter the imposition of secular public education and to greatly expand private Catholic school options. Unlike in the Cuban case, however, the Catholic schools in Puerto Rico largely hewed to the general trend of Americanization in education during the first decades of the century. Blenk invited numerous teaching congregations or orders based in the eastern United States, along with some Europeans, to found new Catholic schools. This meant that English would become the primary language of instruction in these schools, and

[81]"Bishop Gives the Lie," *New York Times*, June 28, 1900, 1; "The Recent Teacher's Conference at San Juan," *Christian Advocate*, 75 (September 1900), 1534.

[82]Aníbal Colón-Rosado, *Crisis de la identidad de la educación católica en Puerto Rico* (Santurce, PR: Distribución Cultural Puertorriqueña Inc., 1981), 28.

observers would later note that even after many years living in Puerto Rico, the American teaching religious rarely learned or used Spanish. Blenk's successors would continue this practice, both in the staffing of Catholic schools and in missionary work. However, in their desperate need to combat Protestantism, the bishops also accepted, with some reluctance, the existence of a popular organization, the Hermanos Cheos, that had emerged spontaneously post-1898 and sent charismatic lay preachers into poor rural and urban neighborhoods to evangelize.[83] As in Cuba, many of the Catholic schools required tuition, and thus their students were more likely to be from middle- or upper-class families, but the Puerto Rican Church also made a deliberate effort to invite religious groups who would found free schools in poor neighborhoods and rural areas to directly contest Protestant missionary efforts. By 1917, there were twenty-seven Catholic schools, of which only three had existed during the colonial era. By 1940, another twenty-five were founded and from 1940 to the early 1970s, there were a hundred more. In spite of these successes, Protestant schooling grew at an even faster clip and continued to outpace the Catholics. Notably, however, from the 1950s on, new Catholic schools were much more likely to be founded by religious orders based in Latin America, a development that interrupted the strongly Americanized character of the Catholic schools during the first half of the century and contributed to what had become a growing insistence by Puerto Rican Catholics who patronized the schools on a return to the use of Spanish as the primary language of instruction.[84]

As a response to what the Puerto Rican Church perceived as constant Protestant pressure in the early decades of the century, Church leaders and Catholic publications continued to campaign on behalf of a public school system that included religious instruction and that separated boys from girls even as they built an extensive network of parochial schools. One outcome of the 1917 synod held in Puerto Rico, the first since the American intervention, was a formal statement to Puerto Rican Catholics that emphasized their obligation to send their children to Catholic schools. The new assertiveness of the Puerto Rican Church toward Catholic education was grounded in its improved legal and financial position after the Supreme Court's 1908 decision in *Ponce v. Roman Catholic Church*, which recognized the Church's property rights, and in a developing strand of Puerto Rican nationalism that emphasized the integral role of Catholicism.[85] This nationalist option, which sought Puerto Rican independence rather than autonomy or statehood, increasingly included the middle and popular classes and not only elites who identified Catholicism with the Hispanic tradition but had been willing to support the Americanization of the Church so long as Catholicism remained central to Puerto Rican society. Pedro Albizu Campos, a Catholic who found inspiration in the Irish struggle against Great Britain and who would later lead the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party in a

[83]Edward L. Cleary, "In the Absence of Missionaries: Lay Preachers Who Preserved Catholicism," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 34, no. 2 (April 2010), 67–70.

[84]Colón-Rosado, *Crisis de la identidad de la educación católica en Puerto Rico*, 29–34, 42; Silva Gotay, *Catolicismo y política en Puerto Rico*, 410–19.

[85]David Maldonado Riviera, "'A Perfect, Irrevocable Gift': Recognizing the Proprietary Church in Puerto Rico, 1898–1908," in *At Home and Abroad: The Politics of American Religion*, ed. Elizabeth Shakman Hurd and Winnifred Fallers Sullivan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 37–50.

strategy of armed conflict to gain independence for the island, adamantly rejected that possibility. After a trip to Puerto Rico in 1926 when Mexican educator José Vasconcelos visited Albizu Campos, Vasconcelos remarked how much Latin American culture would benefit from having "a Catholicism like what the Catholicism of Puerto Rico appears to be—virtuous and free." In a 1948 speech in the city of Ponce on the occasion of a visit by New York cardinal Francis Spellman to support the establishment of a Catholic university there, Albizu Campos warned his fellow Puerto Rican Catholics that

> *Yanquis* are not Catholics because the *yanqui* government is not Catholic—it is an anti-Catholic, anti-Christian government—that has discovered something very important: that it can use *yanqui* Catholics to deceive us who are Latino Catholics.

He emphasized that the new university must use Spanish as the language of instruction, that only Puerto Rican flags should fly at churches, and that Puerto Ricans should be named as priests for the island.[86]

Protestant groups, for their part, continually insisted that they supported the secular public system of education and that this alone would allow Puerto Rico to advance socially and economically.[87] The sharpness of this conflict can be seen in one of the terms of the 1917 Jones Act that made Puerto Ricans US citizens. An emendation to the act, clause 19, spelled out that it was forbidden for public monies to be used to support religious instruction in any form. While the US Constitution disallowed an established church, this clause of the Jones Act more closely resembles the "baby Blaines," or no-aid provisions passed by some states and by territories seeking statehood (Congress had made this a requirement of new state constitutions in the wake of the failure of the Blaine Amendment). As political scientist Ursula Hackett has found, the likelihood and strength of such provisions have tended to correlate closely with a large Catholic population, among other factors.[88] While the clause remains in effect in Puerto Rico, it did not end Catholic advocacy for religious instruction in public schools. The issue remained a significant controversy through the 1950s.[89]

Conclusion

When historians consider the impact of the military occupations on the educational systems of Cuba and Puerto Rico, they often focus on the expansion of public schooling and tend to consider the question of religion and schooling primarily in regard to the influx of Protestant missionaries and the schools they founded.[90] The United

[86]Stevens-Arroyo, "The Catholic Worldview in the Political Philosophy of Pedro Albizu Campos," 54, 69–70. Translation of the quotation found on page 70 is by Stevens-Arroyo.

[87]Silva Gotay, *Catolicismo y política en Puerto Rico*, 264–85.

[88]Ursula Hackett, "Republicans, Catholics and the West: Explaining the Strength of Religious School Aid Prohibitions," *Politics and Religion* 7, no. 3 (Sept. 2014), 499–520.

[89]Silva Gotay, *La iglesia católica de Puerto Rico*, 145.

[90]See note 6 above.

States model of public education, however, was formed out of a conflict between the Protestant majority and a Catholic minority and resulted in a system that tolerated parochial schools but denied them public support, even as the public schools for much of the nineteenth century retained important characteristics that were implicitly Protestant. When this same model was brought to the islands during the military occupations, it represented an important intervention into ongoing debates about political liberalism and the role of the Catholic Church by imposing a settlement of the "school question." Although this represented a decisive break with the past, it had the effect of provoking a response by American Catholics who sought to shape the new imperial relationships by arguing that the majority-minority religious dynamic was fundamentally different from that of the mainland and thus required a different settlement. These arguments did not prevail in the sense of restoring religious education to the new public school systems the occupiers imposed, but they did have the effect of placing limits on the Protestant providentialism that had helped propel US intervention in 1898 and shaped the policies and practices of the subsequent occupations. They certainly created space for a vision of an Americanized Catholicism that might be integral to American imperialism, as Katherine Moran has argued.[91] Yet given that many of the occupiers did equate Catholicism with other cultural characteristics that in their view made these societies backward and unfit for self-rule, "the school question" also became part of Cuban and Puerto Rican nationalist responses to the occupations and their aftermaths. The dynamics of these responses were distinct in Cuba and Puerto Rico because of the differences between the extent and duration of American control, among other factors. The significant expansion of private Catholic schools in the post-occupation periods was a notable outcome of the transformation of education after 1898, but so too were debates between nationalists about whether Catholicism was, or was not, an integral part of national identity and thus potentially anti-imperialist or, on the contrary, perhaps a part of the American imperial project.[92] Such unintended consequences are typical of the inherent conflicts that arise in societies such as the US that profess religious pluralism as a core value, but without the recognition that this commitment to pluralism does not resolve power differentials between majority and minority groups—and much less so in an imperial context.[93]

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[91]López Yustos, *Historia documental*, 169–72; Moran, "Beyond the Black Legend," 50–51.

[92]Martínez-Fernández, *Protestantism and Political Conflict*, 163–64.

[93]Courtney Bender and Pamela E. Klassen, "Introduction: Habits of Pluralism," in *After Pluralism: Reimagining Religious Engagement*, ed. Bender and Klassen (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 1–30.

Cite this article: Lisa Jarvinen, "The 'School Question' in an Imperial Context: Education and Religion during and following the Occupations of Cuba and Puerto Rico," *History of Education Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (February 2022), 84–106. https://doi.org/10.1017/heq.2021.61.