Sam Erman, *Almost Citizens: Puerto Rico, the U.S. Constitution, and Empire*.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. xv + 275 pp. (Cloth US\$ 49.99)

Sam Erman (J.D., Ph.D.) provides an original, useful, and well-written addition to the body of scholarship on U.S. formal empire, the U.S. Supreme Court Insular Cases, and the nonincorporation doctrine. *Almost Citizens*, which focuses primarily on the period 1898–1922, is a legal and political history, and will be important reading for advanced students and scholars in U.S. law and history, as well as Puerto Rican, Caribbean, and comparative imperial history. Trained as a historian by Rebecca Scott, Erman did archival research for this book in Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the United States. His central argument is that racist restraints on imperial expansion that were put in place by the U.S. Reconstruction Constitution eroded as the Supreme Court gave judicial cover to determination by Congress and the executive branch to hold onto Spain's former colonies without extending statehood, citizenship, or constitutional rights to those deemed racially unfit. He focuses on select Puerto Ricans as protagonists in the battle over what nonincorporation and various forms of citizenship would mean. Even as he casts the outcomes as tragic, he is interested in the struggle waged.

Erman cites the relevant body of Puerto Ricanist scholarship—works by José Cabranes, Juan Torruella, Christina Duffy Burnett, Bartholomew Sparrow, Efrén Rivera Ramos, and Charles Venator-Santiago among others—but is cagey about what he thinks he is contributing to it. He claims to be the first to “conjoin the twentieth-century constitutional histories of empire and Reconstruction” (p. 164 n.8), and aims above all to reach students and scholars of U.S. law and history, a vital task. In *Reconsidering the Insular Cases: The Past and Future of American Empire* (2015), legal scholar Christina Duffy Ponsa celebrates the Insular Cases entering the “mainstream of U.S. constitutional scholarship” (p. 1) since 1998, but political scientist Sparrow concludes that learning about the cases, the incorporation doctrine, and the territory clause “is a low priority in most law schools and undergraduate constitutional law classes” (p. 43).

Almost Citizens makes three major contributions to Puerto Ricanist discussions, which tend to focus on what powerful U.S. actors did to Puerto Ricans in decision-making about the Insular Cases, and on how the Cases' legacies continue to impact Puerto Ricans. First, Erman details how Puerto Ricans—especially Federico Degetau y González, Domingo Collazo, Isabel González, and Santiago Iglesias Pantín—fought hard in legal and political arenas to resolve citizenship and status issues on what they considered to be favorable terms to all Puerto Ricans. Current scholarship mentions Degetau, González, and a few other protagonists in passing, but Erman brings them and Collazo center-stage, and provides new insights about the much-studied Iglesias. Gon-

zález's great-granddaughter's stories about family history after the Supreme Court ruling on her case are incorporated into Erman's analysis, as is a keen sense of race, class, and gender hierarchies that divided Puerto Ricans and structured relations among them. Second, Erman provides a fine-grained analysis of the shifting political calculus of Puerto Rican political elites, parties, and unions in relation to U.S. Republicans and Democrats, especially as antiracist Reconstruction-era Republicanism withered.

Erman's account strengthens Rivera Ramos's argument in *The Legal Construction of Identity* (2001) that the Insular Cases helped to constitute a field of power in which the construction of Puerto Rican political subjects took place, producing certain kinds of political discourse and action, while pushing the beginning of that process back in time and showing how Puerto Ricans mobilized particular pre-1898 traditions within it. Even before the first cases were decided in 1901, the elite Degetau drew on Puerto Rican liberal autonomism to persuade U.S. authorities to see Puerto Ricans—or at least leading men—as racially fit for statehood, citizenship, and rights, including the right to govern other Puerto Ricans. Iglesias, for all his mobilization of mass labor action to extract political wins, collaborated with virulently racist Democrats in the name of local autonomy. Collazo and others invoked male honor and female virtue during the González case to win Puerto Ricans' right to free entry into the United States.

Yet Erman excludes early twentieth-century Puerto Ricans who resisted this emerging field of power. José de Diego is barely mentioned, and Rosendo Matienzo Cintrón not at all, despite his rapid journey from annexationism to autonomism to founding the first pro-independence party. By selecting certain Puerto Rican protagonists, preferring statehood as the ultimate resolution of second-class citizenship and nonincorporation, and conceptualizing the granting of statehood as a just anti-racist act by an imperial power, Erman remains partially within the very power relations whose origins he so adeptly analyzes.

Anne S. Macpherson

Department of History, The College at Brockport SUNY

amacpher@brockport.edu