Sowing Seeds and Saving Souls: The Work of Mennonite Central Committee in Puerto Rico, 1943–1950[1]

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As they stood atop a mountain in Aibonito, Puerto Rico, in the summer of 1943, Justus Holsinger and Wilbur Nachtigall took in the view with both wonder and dismay. Below, the "sparkling little stream" of the La Plata River and its surrounding "patchwork of fields" offered an escape from the violence that raged across Europe and the Asia-Pacific region. Far from the front lines, the two men marvelled at the "hundreds of little houses that dotted the mountainsides and valley, inhabited by the most beautiful of God's creation—human souls." Yet the landscape seemed to them as perilous as it was picturesque. Homes "perched precariously on stilts . . . as though even a little breeze might topple [them] into the ravine below." Holsinger and Nachtigall wondered how the locals—mainly farmers by occupation—could possibly succeed in planting crops on land so steep that they could barely "stand upright" on it themselves. More concerning than the position of the fields and homes, however, was the physically and morally precarious state in which their owners seemed to live. "The view was very beautiful," the men concluded, "and yet quite ugly in all its beauty, with the poverty, disease, and sin so common within so many of the little homes." They descended the mountain with a "new determination . . . to bring a better way of life to the people of the La Plata Valley."[2]

Holsinger and Nachtigall's gaze reflected the outlook of the United States government that had sent them to Puerto Rico. As Mennonites, and therefore pacifists, the two men received exemptions from military combat in the Second World War. The US Civilian Public Service (CPS) arranged for them instead to aid in the war effort through alternative service, the government's provision for conscientious objectors. In collaboration with state agencies, alternative service participants laboured on projects related to conservation, infrastructure, medical aid, community building, and economic improvement throughout the mainland United States as well as in US territories like Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.[3] Their work furthered the government's efforts to modernize rural regions of the continental United States and to shape the lands and peoples under its territorial control in the image of the mainland.

In Puerto Rico, those efforts had been institutionalized years before in a New Deal agency, the Puerto Rico Reconstruction Administration (PRRA), which President Franklin Roosevelt signed into effect via executive order in 1935. Designed by scientist and University of Puerto Rico chancellor Carlos E. Chardón, and supported by Puerto Rican Liberal Party senator Luis Muñoz Marín, the PRRA aimed to promote economic growth on the island by alleviating problems such as landlessness and unemployment, which were particularly acute in rural regions.[4] During its more than four-century-long history as a Spanish colony and then US territory, the majority of Puerto Rico's agricultural land had come under the control of producers dedicated to large-scale production of three main export crops: coffee, tobacco, and sugar cane. While small farmers continued to grow some staple crops, export-driven landholders, including commercial agricultural enterprises and *colonos*, or members of an elite sugar-producing class, dominated land ownership on the island. By the time of the PRRA's inception in 1935, 75 percent of rural Puerto Ricans owned no land, and over three-quarters of crop lands on the island were classified as farms producing primarily the three major export crops.[5]

Agricultural reform thus comprised a central part of the PRRA's agenda to reshape rural life in Puerto Rico. The agency initiated programs of land redistribution, purchasing land from large holders and absentee corporations and transferring plots of five to ten acres to small farmers, called "resettlers," on a lease-to-own basis. It established several central service farms across the island, where trained agronomists experimented with food crops and introduced reforestation and soil rehabilitation programs to combat the effects of single-crop farming. Finally, the agency cultivated ties with the University of Puerto Rico and its affiliated agricultural experiment

stations, as well as an international network of universities, which operated as hubs for conducting scientific research.[6] All of those efforts continued a decades-long history of elites viewing Puerto Rican agricultural production as a scientific problem to be solved. Under Spanish colonial rule and early US occupation of the island, planters, scientists, and government agencies established a number of agricultural experiment stations to promote economic growth through research related to export crops. Increasingly, and including under the PRRA, scientists helped shift that research focus to "diversify[ing] the island's agriculture" by expanding the production of both new exports and food crops in an effort to improve Puerto Ricans' living standards.[7]

In one sense, then, the PRRA's work was aimed at remedying agricultural problems that colonialism created—control of land by corporations and colonos, widespread landlessness and poverty among small farmers, and soil depletion resulting from decades of monocrop-focused farming practices. In his plan for the agency, Carlos Chardón framed the PRRA's agenda in democratic terms, calling for "the restoration of the land to the people that cultivate it," and many of its projects enjoyed the wide support of locals.[8] Yet in another sense, the PRRA's work—defined by political leaders and technocrats, who advocated solving socio-economic problems through expert-led planning—sustained a long history of colonial influence in Puerto Rico. As one scholar has argued, the agency continued "a project of colonial developmentalism implemented by an American technocracy in a collaborative consortium of the local political elite."[9]

It was that technocrat-driven developmentalist project that Mennonite CPS workers in Puerto Rico would help to facilitate, even as they viewed alternative service as an opportunity to detach themselves from state power and its call to war. By the early 1940s, the US government had begun to curtail its Depression-era reconstruction activities in Puerto Rico as it faced other funding priorities due to the Second World War. The new CPS program for conscientious objectors would prove the PRRA's salvation: as Justus Holsinger put it, hundreds of men stood ready to serve their country by "promot[ing] better human relations rather than participat[ing] in the mass murder of their generation."[10] Mennonites saw alternative service as a way to aid the US effort despite their disagreement with the war itself—a way to evangelize the nation, in a sense, in addition to the individuals they would reach through their service.[11] The agricultural nature of the PRRA's work, meanwhile, gave Mennonite CPS members—many of whom hailed from rural communities in the

Midwest and Pennsylvania—the opportunity to bring their familiarity with farming to bear on their wartime service.[12]

Mennonites who served in Puerto Rico formed part of the Brumbaugh Reconstruction Unit, a partnership between the CPS and historic peace churches to provide alternative service opportunities for conscientious objectors.[13] Mennonites' subunit, operated by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and known as the La Plata Project, was located in the island's mountainous interior near the town of Aibonito, in the La Plata River Valley. There, MCC workers ran a hospital and conducted medical and educational outreach and agricultural extension. At the war's end, MCC and the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities (MBMC) purchased the PRRA's properties from the US government in order to maintain the project together as a joint service and evangelistic program. MCC involvement in the La Plata Project continued for several more years until it transferred its interests to the MBMC's Mennonite Relief Committee in 1950.[14]

MCC work in 1940s Puerto Rico bridged one localized project with a broader developmentalist agenda envisioned by state actors. Focusing on its agricultural component, this article frames Mennonites' La Plata Project as a precursor to later international development programs, which became part of the United States' official foreign policy agenda during the Cold War. By the time that President Harry Truman set that agenda in motion in 1949 with his Point Four Program, which aimed to bring so-called "underdeveloped" nations out of poverty through the sharing of scientific knowledge and technical expertise, MCC and other religious organizations had been performing the work of development for years, both independently and in collaboration with state actors.[15] Notably, though, their approach to that work differed from that of their state-sanctioned successors. Whereas Mennonites in Puerto Rico prioritized small-scale agricultural improvement, an approach informed by their deep agrarian roots and historical commitment to communitarian models of farming, state-led development programs that followed the PRRA increasingly emphasized large-scale modernization and industrialization.[16] In Puerto Rico, that trend manifested in Operation Bootstrap, an economic plan engineered by onetime PRRA supporter (and later governor) Luis Muñoz Marín that restructured the island's economy into one based on industry and manufacturing.[17] President John F. Kennedy would invite Muñoz Marín and his Operation Bootstrap co-architect, Teodoro Moscoso, to spread the gospel of modernization through the Alliance for Progress, the United States' Cold War–era, Latin America–wide development program.[18] Thus, the larger story of Mennonites' La Plata Project is one of far-

reaching, albeit unintended, significance. Aided by MCC, the work of the PRRA in the staging ground of Puerto Rico helped form state actors' developmentalist ideas and methodologies for subsequent deployment throughout the region. These approaches often contradicted Mennonites' own vision for how development should proceed.

Historical and Theological Background of the La Plata Project

With long ties to the soil that instilled in them a sense of farming as a divinely ordered vocation, American Mennonites stood eager to impart their agricultural heritage to others by the time of the Second World War.[19] That agricultural heritage took a specific form: characterized by small-scale cultivation and a preference for community-based farming over corporate agribusiness, Mennonite farms represented a model on the wane by the twentieth century. As scholars have argued, Mennonite agriculturists exhibited "a uniquely sympathetic response to land," employing practices such as crop rotation and the use of natural soil fertilizers while maintaining farms that tended to be smaller, "more carefully cultivated, [and] more highly technologized" than average farms. Even as many smallholders bowed out of farming over the twentieth century as the industry grew increasingly defined by commercial agribusiness, this devotion to an agrarian life endured. Historians Royden Loewen and Steven Nolt have noted that Mennonites remained farmers "in larger numbers [and] longer than almost any other group" in North America.[20]

In addition to their agricultural heritage, North American Mennonites carried with them a missionary spirit defined by a desire to serve both the physical and spiritual needs of people—a desire that shaped their forays into relief and humanitarian work during the war-torn decades of the early twentieth century and inspired the formation of Mennonite Central Committee in 1920. Mennonite leaders cited historical examples and biblical commands as the impetus for MCC's work in European relief and recovery following the First World War. Helping others in need played a central role in Mennonite history, they claimed, and the Bible explicitly instructed Christian believers to comfort the suffering.[21]

Two decades later, Mennonites in Puerto Rico expressed similar views regarding the importance of combining spiritual support and works of service—both of which, they believed, were necessary to fulfilling Christ's command to spread the gospel. "As a program of service without concern for the spiritual welfare falls short of Christ's commandment," stated one CPS member from his post at

La Plata, "so does one of preaching without the social service which prepares the soil and makes the spiritual growth possible." As participants in a US government–sponsored program, MCC workers refrained from engaging in evangelistic activities during wartime. Yet as Justus Holsinger (who would become the La Plata Project's director in 1948) later suggested, their emphasis on "ministering to human needs of the people 'in the Name of Christ'" gave them a way to practice evangelism despite their inability to carry out direct proselytization.[22]

Agricultural Evangelism at La Plata

Much of Mennonite CPS workers' ministering to the material needs of Puerto Ricans played out on the grounds of the PRRA's central service farm, built on a stretch of land encompassing over four and a half thousand acres in the La Plata River Valley. Within the boundaries of the PRRA's project, approximately 362 resettlers occupied 150 farms, working land that they had acquired through the agency. The land was largely "treeless," according to Holsinger, and "rather seriously depleted from tobacco culture," which had defined agriculture in the region for decades.[23] A native crop that predated Puerto Rico's colonial period, planters first produced tobacco for export in the early seventeenth century, and its economic role on the island expanded in the nineteenth century as the global cigar trade grew. During the early twentieth century, tobacco manufacturing rivalled sugar production as Puerto Rico's main agro-industrial output, thriving especially in the interior "tobacco heartland" of the island, where Aibonito is located. By the time of Mennonites' arrival in the early 1940s, however, tobacco production had declined significantly as a percentage of Puerto Rico's export economy.[24]

Mennonite CPS workers believed that the La Plata River Valley held promise for crops beyond tobacco to thrive. The region presented them with an opportunity to evangelize local resettlers on behalf of new foodways and agricultural practices that they believed would raise standards of living in the community. This agricultural evangelism took place through demonstrations on the central service farm, where CPS workers conducted experiments with food crops and counselled resettlers regarding "better tillage and farm management practices"—instructing them in the use of fertilizers, methods of erosion control, the breeding and raising of livestock, and the planting of "improved varieties of seeds." Mennonite agricultural workers also addressed resettlers through the project's Spanish-language newsletter, *El Heraldo de La Plata*, which printed

articles written by CPS workers themselves as well as those copied from agricultural experts in the mainland and local institutions like the University of Puerto Rico. The newsletter reached hundreds of homes in the Aibonito region each month, making it a convenient tool, according to Justus Holsinger, for "teaching [resettlers] how to better utilize their agricultural resources."[25]

Technocrats based on the mainland and in Puerto Rico shared Holsinger's take on the need for expert guidance to help transform agrarian and urban life on the island. New Dealer Rexford Tugwell, whose term as Puerto Rico's last appointed governor coincided with Mennonites' arrival there, displayed what one scholar has characterized as "a racist Malthusianism reminiscent of views held by other American officials in Puerto Rico." The rural people of Puerto Rico, Tugwell disparagingly observed during travels to the island during the 1930s, made "poor material for social organization," while the shantytowns of urban San Juan displayed the "order and governance" of "a homunculus or some other low form of life," in need of experts' top-down planning to bring order and progress. Tugwell's successor as governor, Puerto Rican Luis Muñoz Marín, despite having a tendency to romanticize Puerto Rican rural life, embraced a similarly paternalistic and Americanized vision of progress defined by modernization. Muñoz Marín appropriated the image of the *jíbaro*, or peasant, to represent his populist Popular Democratic Party, even as he led the island through an urban and industrial transformation during his fifteen-year governorship. His simultaneous promotion of both jíbaro culture and modernization mirrored the contradictions in his broader effort to promote "a feeling of sovereignty" among Puerto Ricans while also subduing independence movements and advocating for the island's status as a commonwealth of the United States.[26]

Like government officials and technocratic planners, Mennonites from the mainland characterized jíbaro culture as requiring expert-driven reform in order for rural Puerto Ricans to enjoy social progress and economic stability. In particular, Mennonites at La Plata sought reform of jíbaro agricultural practices and dietary norms. CPS workers expressed concern about the lack of fruits, vegetables, and animal proteins in Puerto Rican diets. Besides beans—along with rice, an island staple—Mennonites reported that sources of protein were "scarce," with milk, eggs, and meat constituting "a luxury." They lamented that Puerto Ricans from poorer class backgrounds either did not have the resources to purchase more nutritious foods or had "not developed a taste for the things most lacking in [their] diet," and blamed "superstitions" for locals' reluctance to eat the island's native fruits.[27]

Such observations failed to take into account the historical context. Puerto Rican foodways were influenced by agricultural and economic patterns established over centuries. Although cattle and other livestock had remained common sources of food for most of the period of Spanish colonialism, meat consumption for non-elite Puerto Ricans became increasingly rare during the nineteenth century due to a combination of factors including population growth, the rise of cash-crop monocultures that limited the use of land for raising livestock, and a shift toward breeding cattle primarily for draft rather than for food.[28] Likewise, a lack of electricity in rural areas prevented long-term storage of milk or meat. Prior to the widespread electrification of Puerto Rico, an effort begun under the PRRA, what electrical service existed on the island largely went to supporting irrigation for commercial agriculture.[29] Further, mainlanders neglected to acknowledge that, especially in tobacco regions like Aibonito, small farms still grew significant amounts of staples. Farmers planted corn and beans, bananas and plantains, and sweet potatoes alongside tobacco or in fallow fields.[30]

Despite this evidence of subsistence farming, the La Plata Project workers used their newsletter to evangelize resettlers on behalf of trying new food crops that they deemed more nutritious than those more commonly consumed. *El Heraldo* pitched the planting of fruits and vegetables to resettlers as an enterprise that would promote both nutrition and economic growth and lead to an improved quality of life overall. "Fresh vegetables constitute one of the healthiest and most nutritious foods . . . a very good source of vitamins, proteins, and minerals," claimed one article. Its author urged farmers to plant Victory Gardens to supplement their diets and sustain their families through wartime food shortages. The article offered advice on how and when to plant crops such as tomatoes, peppers, onions, and lettuce. In an example of the institutional collaboration that the PRRA facilitated, the author added that staff at the local public school and the University of Puerto Rico's Division of Agriculture stood willing to lend their help to resettlers' Victory Garden projects.[31] Another article in *El Heraldo* showcased the diversity of produce that could be grown on the island, counselling that a grove of fruit trees near the home could serve as a small park, providing shade and refreshment on summer days. "In this park," the author noted, "you can have trees with oranges, grapefruits, avocados, lemons, soursop, Spanish limes, guavas, mangoes" and more—all of which, the author explained, would add carbon to the soil for fertilizer in addition to providing nutrient-rich food.[32]

Growing successful fruit and vegetable crops on the island in mainland fashion, however, proved more problematic than Menno-

nite CPS workers had initially expected. While they assumed early on that the crops they selected would grow easily in Puerto Rico with its mild, tropical climate, that same climate allowed pests and plant diseases to flourish. The prevalence of aphids, worms, ants, and fungi "require[d] constant watchfulness and continued spraying of the plants with chemicals," observed La Plata Project members.[33] Moreover, as Justus Holsinger and Wilbur Nachtigall had pointed out upon their arrival to Aibonito, the geography of the island differed drastically from that back home on Mennonite farms in the Midwest—a reality that made it impossible to transfer mainland agricultural models to Puerto Rico outright. The mountainous terrain, in particular, exacerbated soil erosion and defied attempts by farmers to use modern machinery like tractors, forcing them to "resort to oxen and the hoe to cultivate [their] land."[34]

Steep land posed a problem for another MCC agricultural project at La Plata: the introduction of cattle, in an effort to promote dairy farming and protein intake among resettlers. In that effort, Mennonites partnered with Heifers for Relief, a recently established organization with connections to the Brethren Service Commission that shipped purebred heifers to communities in need. In 1945, the La Plata Project received seventeen heifers and a bull from farmers in the mainland US through the organization.[35] The heifers were Holsteins, which, while favoured over other breeds for their high volume of milk production and low butterfat content, were not well suited to Puerto Rico's hilly terrain. Some ended up stumbling over the sloped fields, breaking their backs or legs and having to be butchered. Others were susceptible to parasites and diseases common on the island. After a few years of such setbacks, La Plata Project members turned their efforts to raising dairy goats and breeding native cattle with "high quality" stock through artificial insemination, which they felt held more promise for improving dairy production on the island than did the importation of Holsteins.[36]

Perhaps more difficult for Mennonites at La Plata than raising a thriving dairy herd was convincing resettlers of the importance of milk consumption and the benefits of keeping domesticated livestock. Pleas to drink more milk and raise farm animals were delivered to the community through *El Heraldo de La Plata*, which, following its usual fashion, appealed to the opinions of mainland experts. "It is scientifically proven that cow's milk constitutes the most complete food," claimed one article, which went on to highlight milk's high quantities of protein, vitamins, and calcium—the latter of which it noted was especially important for children as their teeth and bones developed. The article cited a medical practitioner who had visited Puerto Rico and judged it "one of the most calcium-

deficient countries."[37] Another piece preached the view of US "authorities . . . that if it had not been for domesticated farm animals, man would still be living in huts and caves, and would still go about barefoot, ragged, and malnourished." Caring for animals—which provided the milk, meat, eggs, wool, and skins necessary for nourishing and clothing human beings—constituted "a job of inestimable value," the article's author argued.[38]

If Puerto Ricans' dietary differences dismayed La Plata Project members, so too did the agricultural methods they employed, as that article's reference to the value of manual labour indicated. Project director Melvin Lauver wrote in 1948 that local farmers were "unable to tend animals in American fashion," and cited "poor feeding and handling" as a reason that the first imported heifers' offspring turned out to be of unsatisfactory "quality" for breeding more stock.[39] Other MCC workers criticized Puerto Ricans' attitudes toward farm labour itself, lamenting that while they readily participated in the cultivation of commercial crops, resettlers tended to conceive of smallholder farming as a peasant's vocation that was "not engaged in by persons of dignity and culture." Years of evangelizing them on behalf of "the dignity of manual labor," claimed Justus Holsinger, would be necessary for raising standards of living in the community.[40]

Puerto Rican resettlers may have been surprised to find that Mennonites considered them reluctant to engage in manual labour despite their long history of work as commercial farmers. Tobacco cultivation—then Aibonito's economic foundation—was a particularly labour-intensive endeavour, requiring a farmer's "constant attention" throughout the process of preparing the soil, planting, harvesting, and curing.[41] Moreover, the success of subsequently introduced agricultural ventures like poultry-raising in Aibonito speaks to resettlers' willingness to embrace small-scale farm labour. While CPS workers had operated a small poultry project during the war to provide food for the subunit and hospital, MCC expanded those efforts after purchasing the government properties from the PRRA. In 1948, it invested in three hundred chicks with the immediate goal of continuing to produce eggs for the unit's workers and a long-term vision for developing a breeding stock and small-scale industry that could "assist greatly in increasing the family income and thus raise the economic standards of the people."[42] Poultry farming, surmised La Plata Project members, was easier on smaller plots of land and required less intensive labour than dairying or growing certain crops.[43]

As they set up the poultry project, MCC workers kept a flock of New Hampshire Reds for "community demonstration" purposes,

while they sold hatchlings at cost to Puerto Rican farmers and provided "advice and assistance . . . in building coops, feeding, sanitation, marketing, and other phases of poultry management." The effort caught community interest quickly, and project annual reports show that the poultry program grew significantly over the next two years. In 1950 alone, local farmers purchased four thousand baby chicks, which they raised in small flocks as broilers to supplement their families' diets as well as to sell for income.[44]

That same year, however, marked the end of MCC participation in the La Plata Project. In January, the MBMC's Mennonite Relief Committee took charge of the service arm of the project and continued to run it with the same underlying mission as MCC—and with many of the same personnel.[45] At the end of MCC's involvement, the demonstration farm comprised eighty acres and boasted a wide variety of farm animals, including hogs, goats, and rabbits, in addition to its established herd of dairy cows and newly thriving poultry program.[46] By then, Mennonites had become well known in the Aibonito community through their agricultural outreach efforts, which encompassed classes on farming techniques, work with local 4-H clubs, and a store that provided local farmers with everything from livestock and farm equipment to veterinary medications and fertilizers.[47] The project caught the wider attention, too, of development-minded politicians like Luis Muñoz Marín, who, as governor in 1954, lauded Mennonites' service to the community through the CPS program.[48]

Outcomes of the La Plata Project

The agricultural development efforts that MCC joined in wartime Puerto Rico continued under the MBMC through the late 1950s, and their legacy endured well beyond the official end of the La Plata Project.[49] Yet the economic, environmental, and evangelistic aspects of that legacy at times looked different from Mennonites' original intentions for developing Puerto Rico agriculturally and spiritually. Certainly, both agricultural and spiritual conversions accompanied Mennonites' work on the island: new industries emerged that boosted economic production and food security, and several small Mennonite congregations sprouted up beyond the Aibonito region. Complications and unexpected consequences, however, also arose from the work begun at La Plata.

The fledgling poultry and dairy industries that Mennonites helped establish during the 1940s flourished over the following decades. When he returned to Puerto Rico for a visit in 1969, Justus

Holsinger observed that livestock production in the La Plata Valley had grown significantly, and he noted that the dairy industry represented "one of the areas of greatest agricultural improvement." Poultry and egg production had proven successful as well, and Holsinger wrote with satisfaction that the "old tobacco barns of the La Plata–Aibonito region [had] been replaced with huge poultry barns." In 1970, Aibonito ranked as the largest poultry-producing region in Puerto Rico—a position that it retained at least a decade into the twenty-first century.[50] Holsinger attributed the development of the region's poultry industry largely to the efforts of Mennonite agriculturists, especially Stanley Miller (unconnected to the La Plata Project), who started a poultry dressing plant in the area that grew into the island's leading processing facility. The resulting increase in poultry production made eggs and meat more affordable sources of protein for lower income families and, in Holsinger's estimation, "helped improve health and nutrition" on the island.[51]

Puerto Rico's thriving poultry industry soon looked less like the small-scale, family farm–model enterprise that Mennonites of the La Plata Project had encouraged. By the 1970s, most of the broilers processed at the plant that Miller founded were raised on larger farms with twenty-four thousand birds or more, compared with the small flocks of fifty or fewer that La Plata resettlers had raised in the 1950s.[52] Along with the growth of the poultry industry came environmental issues—especially water pollution caused by runoff from manure-laden soils on poultry farms. Holsinger lamented after his visit that "poultry producers have not been as successful in combating community pollution as they have in helping to improve the diet of Puerto Rican families," noting that production waste was often dumped on open land "to the discomfort of the inhabitants" nearby.[53] That problem persisted, and by the end of the twentieth century, studies conducted by University of Puerto Rico scientists of the island's "poultry zone," which included Aibonito, "revealed a widespread threat to water quality by excessive phosphorous levels."[54]

Likewise, Mennonite efforts to promote a dairy industry contributed to unintended but adverse ecological changes. Somewhat paradoxically, in order to introduce more animal protein into Puerto Ricans' largely plant-based diets, members of the La Plata Project found themselves preoccupied with cultivating new varieties of plants to serve as food sources for protein-rich livestock. Experiments with new types of grasses and other vegetation led Mennonites to endorse the planting of kudzu, a legume that they found "produce[d] more and better quality feed than any other grass tried."[55] A vine native to Asia, kudzu was first imported to North America in

the late nineteenth century and the USDA's Soil Conservation Service (SCS) widely promoted its use as a solution to erosion in the US South during the 1930s due to its "dense foliage" and adaptability for use as a ground cover.[56] Described by government scientists as "a vigorous, spreading perennial," kudzu thrived in moist conditions and controlled weeds by choking them out.[57] In 1940, the SCS first introduced the tropical variety of the plant to Puerto Rico at the USDA's experiment stations in Mayagüez and Río Piedras, where scientists conducted trials to assess its worth as an erosion control method and forage crop. Over the following years, the agency sent hundreds of pounds of seed to the island, and state agronomists partnered with Puerto Rican farmers and 4-H clubs to plant it throughout the interior highlands.[58]

In addition to introducing kudzu on their own demonstration farm, the La Plata Project's Mennonite agriculturists at La Plata participated in the spread of the vine on the island by sowing it on hillsides for pasturage and harvesting seed to sell to local farmers "to encourage [its] planting."[59] The experiments that MCC workers and others conducted with kudzu, however, took a turn their designers had not envisioned. Only a decade later agricultural scientists began to realize that the "miracle" vine they had promoted during the 1940s posed a serious "ecological problem." In its new habitat in the Americas, the plant grew rampantly without the natural controls that it had in its native Asia. The USDA ceased recommending kudzu as a cover crop in 1953, and by the 1970s characterized it as a "weed," with the "aggressive growth" that had once made it so attractive leading to costly eradication efforts.[60]

While Mennonites' agricultural evangelism had far-reaching effects, their success in transforming Puerto Rican spiritual traditions proved less widespread. Following their purchase of the La Plata Project from the government after the war, the MBMC and MCC expanded their programs to include religious offerings in addition to community services. The agencies constructed a chapel for the use of both Mennonite workers and the wider Aibonito community and began holding weekly church meetings, an "evangelistic service" on Sunday evenings, Bible studies, summer Bible schools, and "home visitations."[61] The addition of religious services to the agenda fulfilled the hopes that MCC workers had held for the venture from its wartime beginnings, when one member of the unit stated that the project's work should include "making Christians out of these people"—despite the fact that the majority of the people the worker referenced were likely already Catholic Christians.[62] The evangelistic efforts that MCC instated after the war thus followed a history of Protestant missions to the island that accompanied the United

States' broader imperial agenda. Along with reforming the island's economy and agricultural practices, mainlanders in Puerto Rico hoped to re-shape local religious traditions that they deemed "backward"—namely Catholicism.[63]

Yet, as Mennonites and their predecessors in the mission field found, Protestantism did not take hold in Puerto Rico as easily as poultry or kudzu. When Holsinger returned to the island in 1969, Protestants remained religious minorities in Puerto Rico at large and in the La Plata Valley, where close to 90 percent of the people continued to identify as Catholics. To MCC workers of decades past who had viewed Puerto Ricans' Catholic beliefs and culture as less than Christian, this statistic may have seemed discouraging. In later years, however, Holsinger took comfort in noting that fourteen Mennonite churches had formed across the island, along with two primary schools and a "Bible Institute" located in Aibonito. Of the region's small Protestant population, most claimed membership in the local Mennonite church, and the vast majority of the people whom Holsinger surveyed in the area indicated that "Mennonites had made a positive contribution in the community" through their past service work.[64]

Conclusion

The Mennonite venture in Puerto Rico cast influence far beyond the island in the expanding field of international development. Following its work with the La Plata Project, MCC continued to carry out small-scale community development initiatives in other parts of the world. In 1953, representatives from MCC joined with those from the Brethren Service Commission and the American Friends Service Committee to establish International Voluntary Services (IVS). Officially a nonsectarian organization, IVS nevertheless drew its inspiration and operating philosophies from its founders' past work in the mission field. Likewise, the organization continued to target its efforts at "village-level, people-to-people development programs," as all three of its founding agencies had done through Puerto Rico's Brumbaugh Reconstruction Unit.[65] IVS gained a solid reputation in the field, especially for its work in Asia and Africa, and when the John F. Kennedy Administration created the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Peace Corps in 1961, it looked to IVS as its model for those programs.[66] The participation of MCC and other organizations in the creation of IVS represented increasing efforts by religious groups, both Protestant and Catholic, to reform and re-shape the postwar and Cold War

world through international development. It also signified the willingness of faith communities to collaborate in those efforts with state actors, whose own development programs were often directly influenced by religious doctrines and traditions.[67]

Yet the agricultural focus of earlier religious development projects, including the model put forward by MCC in Puerto Rico, faded away in future iterations of US development efforts. As historians have pointed out, mid-twentieth-century social and economic trends, in addition to policies, led increasing numbers of people to "[organize] their lives around industry rather than agriculture."[68] The effects of that transition were evident by Holsinger's return visit to the island in 1969. By then, he observed, most Aibonito families were working in industry, while only four percent made their primary living through farming. Holsinger praised Luis Muñoz Marín for his role in implementing Operation Bootstrap, remarking that living standards on the island had increased significantly thanks to the industrial development that the program had wrought.[69] Holsinger did not note the high rates of unemployment that Operation Bootstrap also produced, especially among agricultural workers—many of whom migrated to the continental United States in search of jobs.[70]

Operation Bootstrap incentivized industrial growth over agriculture and this prefigured—and directly inspired—the emphasis of Cold War–era development models beyond Puerto Rico. As historians have shown, the PRRA and Operation Bootstrap made Puerto Rico an early model for later state and private development efforts in Latin America, from the Alliance for Progress to the Rockefeller Foundation's work in the region.[71] Yet in Puerto Rico, as in other parts of Latin America, development did not eradicate the economic problems that its theorists and practitioners targeted. Unemployment, rural poverty, and economic dependence on mainland markets continued. Economic planners and developmentalists like Luis Muñoz Marín maintained this colonial status quo in Puerto Rico.[72]

Although he commended Muñoz Marín for his economic plan and its results, Justus Holsinger seemed to lament the conflicts that decades of efforts by "government officials, businessmen, educators, and missionaries" to "Americanize" the island had caused—in particular, through their promotion of the "desire for material abundance."[73] While he did not overtly acknowledge his own role in that Americanization project, Holsinger's remarks reveal a change in perspective that MCC had also undergone by that time. Since the 1950s, MCC has seen its international development work as part of a broader effort to foster peace by "addressing root causes of conflict and war." The political and cultural upheavals of the 1960s, and

especially their experiences on the ground in places like Central America, led MCCers to adopt what one scholar has characterized as "a philosophy of long-term engagement with communities," which entails "empowering locals" to take control of the peace-building process. If outward-facing work aimed at reforming others characterized its years in Puerto Rico, MCC turned those reform efforts inward in later years, as it enacted changes in its approach to development. More than half a century after its work on the La Plata Project, MCC defined its mission by a commitment to promoting "interchange" and "building relationships that are mutually transformative"—a distinct shift from its earlier focus on transforming local communities with outside expertise.[74]

Notes

[1] An early draft of this article was initially presented at the "MCC at 100" Conference held at the University of Winnipeg in October 2021. I am grateful to the other members of my panel and the audience for their comments, as well as two anonymous reviewers for the *Journal of Mennonite Studies* who offered helpful suggestions on an earlier version of the manuscript.

[2] Justus G. Holsinger, *Serving Rural Puerto Rico: A History of Eight Years of Service by the Mennonite Church* (Scottdale, PA: Mennonite Publishing House, 1952), 27–29.

[3] Justus G. Holsinger, *La Obra Menonita en Puerto Rico, 1943–1981 / Mennonite Work in Puerto Rico, 1943–1981*, ed. Tom Lehman and Rafael Falcón, 2nd ed. (San Bernardino, CA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing, 2014), 8; Paul Toews, *Mennonites in American Society, 1930–1970: Modernity and the Persistence of Religious Community* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1996), 131–145.

[4] Manuel R. Rodríguez, *A New Deal for the Tropics: Puerto Rico during the Depression Era, 1932–1935* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2011), 129; César J. Ayala and Rafael Bernabe, *Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History since 1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 101–102.

[5] José O. Solá, "Colonialism, Planters, Sugarcane, and the Agrarian Economy of Caguas, Puerto Rico, between the 1890s and 1930," *Agricultural History* 85, no. 3 (Summer 2011): 351–352, 358; César J. Ayala and Laird W. Bergad, *Agrarian Puerto Rico: Reconsidering Rural Economy and Society, 1899–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 4–8, 109, 242–246. According to Solá, most *colonos* "owned medium to small farms" but "control[ed] the vast majority of the land on the island." Ayala and Bergad emphasize that food crops were often grown alongside export crops on land classified as coffee, tobacco, or cane farms. Likewise, they emphasize that land ownership varied by region across the island. In the tobacco regions, for example, farmers had a greater likelihood of owning their land in the mid-1930s. See also Teresita A. Levy, *Puerto Ricans in the Empire: Tobacco Growers and U.S. Colonialism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015), chap. 2.

[6] Holsinger, *Serving Rural Puerto Rico*, 5–12; Rodríguez, 131–133; Timothy Lorek, "The Puerto Rican Connection: Recovering the 'Cultural Triangle' in Global Histories of Agricultural Development," *Agricultural History* 94, no. 1 (Winter 2020): 111. For more on Puerto Rico's history as a key site of transnational scientific knowledge exchange from the colonial period through the early twentieth century, see Stuart McCook, *States of Nature: Science, Agriculture, and Environment in the Spanish Caribbean, 1760–1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002).

[7] Stuart McCook, "Promoting the 'Practical': Science and Agricultural Modernization in Puerto Rico and Colombia, 1920–1940," *Agricultural History* 75, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 53–59, 77–79. As McCook shows, prior to his role with the PRRA, Carlos Chardón proved instrumental in helping to shift the focus of agricultural research on the island and gain buy-in from planters.

[8] Rodríguez, 129; Geoff Burrows, "Rural Hydro-Electrification and the Colonial New Deal: Modernization, Experts, and Rural Life in Puerto Rico," *Agricultural History* 91, no. 3 (Summer 2017): 295, 313.

[9] Rodríguez, 137.

[10] Holsinger, *Serving Rural Puerto Rico*, 12; Justus G. Holsinger and Salome Holsinger, *Puerto Rico: Island of Progress* (self-pub. by Tom Lehman, 2013), 136.

[11] Brian Froese has highlighted how Mennonite CPS members viewed their work in terms of pushing back against a spirit of militarism during the Second World War. Brian Froese, *California Mennonites* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015), 137–138.

[12] Biographical information on the original Mennonite CPS workers stationed in Puerto Rico is found at "CPS Unit Number 043-02," Mennonite Central Committee, https://civilianpublicservice.org/camps/43/2 (accessed Nov. 11, 2021).

[13] Named after the late Martin G. Brumbaugh, the first US Commissioner of Education for Puerto Rico and a minister in the Church of the Brethren, the unit encompassed three subdivisions run by Mennonite Central Committee, the Brethren Service Commission, and the Friends Service Committee, each on different parts of the island. Holsinger, *Mennonite Work in Puerto Rico*, 8–12.

[14] Holsinger, *Serving Rural Puerto Rico*, 10–19, 67–70.

[15] Scholars widely consider Truman's Point Four Program as the beginning of official U.S. development efforts. See Gilbert Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith* (London: Zed Books, 1997), chap. 4; Amanda Kay McVety, *Enlightened Aid: U.S. Development as Foreign Policy in Ethiopia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), chap. 4; Stephen Macekura, "The Point Four Program and U.S. International Development Policy," *Political Science Quarterly* 128, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 127–160; and Sara Lorenzini, *Global Development: A Cold War History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), chap. 2. Contemporary government officials and their advisors often acknowledged the contributions of missionaries and religious groups to development, which had begun around the turn of the twentieth century. See Edwin A. Bock, *Fifty Years of Technical Assistance: Some Administrative Experiences of U.S. Voluntary Agencies* (Chicago: Public Administration Clearing House, 1954); James G. Maddox, *Technical Assistance by Religious Agencies in Latin America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956); and Arthur F. Raper, "The Role of Pilot and Demonstration

Projects in Community Development Work," paper presented at the ICA Inter-Regional Conference, Bangkok, Thailand, Mar. 19–24, 1956, in U.S. International Cooperation Administration, *Community Development Bulletin*, no. 2 (Sept. 1956). Historians, however, have paid scant attention to the religious origins of development. Brief mentions of missionaries as pioneers of development occur in Merle Curti and Kendall Birr, *Prelude to Point Four: American Technical Missions Overseas, 1838–1938* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1954); Robert Daniel, "Pioneering Point Four," *Agricultural History* 29, no. 3 (July 1955): 122–126; Joseph L. Grabill, *Protestant Diplomacy and the Near East: Missionary Influence on American Policy, 1810–1927* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971); David Ekbladh, *The Great American Mission: Modernization and the Construction of an American World Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); and David Hollinger, *Protestants Abroad: How Missionaries Tried to Change the World but Changed America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017). Harald Fischer-Tiné provides a more thorough treatment in "The YMCA and Low-Modernist Rural Development in South Asia, c.1922–1957," *Past and Present*, no. 240 (Aug. 2018): 193–234. Of these, only Ekbladh and Hollinger discuss MCC, and only then in passing reference to its role in inspiring the formation of the nonsectarian, nonprofit development organization International Voluntary Services in 1953.

16 Scholars such as Daniel Immerwahr have rightly pointed out that campaigns for small-scale community development existed alongside those for modernization, and became especially popular by the 1960s. Daniel Immerwahr, *Thinking Small: The Lure of Community Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015). Missionaries and religious groups involved in development early on—especially Mennonite groups—had much in common with the "communitarians" that Immerwahr examines, though I would argue that they emphasized agriculture to a greater extent than did later nonsectarian community development programs.

17 Ayala and Bernabe, 179–180.

18 Lorek, 111, 119. Muñoz Marín advised Kennedy on the program, while Moscoso served as its director. For more on Moscoso's role with the Alliance for Progress, see A. W. Maldonado, *Teodoro Moscoso and Puerto Rico's Operation Bootstrap* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), chap. 15 and 16.

19 Historians Royden Loewen and Steven M. Nolt have characterized Mennonites' view of agriculture as a "Divine Calling." Royden Loewen and Steven M. Nolt, *Seeking Places of Peace: A Global Mennonite History* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2012), 82. Writing in 1945, William Stauffer, a Mennonite pastor from Ohio, articulated that view explicitly in an article for the journal *The Mennonite*. "Farming is a sacred calling. Farming is a way of life," wrote Stauffer. "To a Christian farmer the earth is holy. The soil is sacred. The land which he farms has been committed to his stewardship as a sacred heritage. . . . And it is his God-given task to so use it that he can pass it on to his children as a richer heritage than it was when it came into his stewardship." William H. Stauffer, "Life on the Land," *The Mennonite*, May 1, 1945, 8.

20 Loewen and Nolt, *Seeking Places of Peace*, 82–85. On Mennonite farmers' relationship with land and agricultural commerce, see also Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 174–176.

[21] James C. Juhnke, *Vision, Doctrine, War: Mennonite Identity and Organization in America, 1890–1930* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1989), 249–257.

[22] Holsinger, *Serving Rural Puerto Rico*, 68, 193–194.

[23] Holsinger, *Serving Rural Puerto Rico*, 41; Holsinger and Holsinger, *Puerto Rico: Island of Progress,* 135–136.

[24] Ayala and Bergad, 91–99. The decline applied to both manufactured and unmanufactured exports.

[25] Holsinger, *Serving Rural Puerto Rico*, 122, 145–147; Holsinger and Holsinger, *Puerto Rico: Island of Progress,* 146–147. Holsinger and his wife claimed in their memoir that *El Heraldo* comprised "the only reading materials in almost all La Plata home[s]" during the 1940s and 1950s.

[26] Lorek, 118; Carmelo Esterrich, *Concrete and Countryside: The Urban and the Rural in 1950s Puerto Rican Culture* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018), 9–10, 18–19, 22–28, 117; Ayala and Bernabe, 152–153. See also A. W. Maldonado's discussion of Muñoz Marín's and Moscoso's views on agriculture and *jíbaro* culture in *Teodoro Moscoso and Puerto Rico's Operation Bootstrap*, chap. 3.

[27] *Río La Plata*, vol. 1, no. 3 (Dec. 1943): 4, box 3, folder 68, Mennonite Board of Missions Overseas Ministries Puerto Rico Field Records 1942–1966, Mennonite Church USA Archives (MCUSA), Elkhart, IN.

[28] Cruz Miguel Ortíz Cuadra, *Eating Puerto Rico: A History of Food, Culture, and Identity*, trans. Russ Davidson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 184–186.

[29] Burrows, 302–303.

[30] Ayala and Bergad, 105–107. Ayala and Bergad note that in 1920, for instance, the tobacco heartland contained considerably "more land . . . planted in food crops (42 percent) than in tobacco (28 percent)."

[31] Fernando Del Río, "Huertos de la victoria," *El Heraldo de La Plata* 1, no. 5 (Jan. 1945): 3–5, box 1, folder 74, Mennonite Board of Missions Overseas Ministries Puerto Rico Field Records 1942–1966, MCUSA. Translation by the author. In their promotion of Victory Gardens, Mennonites joined government agencies like the USDA, along with states, private businesses, and voluntary organizations, in encouraging citizens to become self-sufficient food producers—a goal that ultimately benefited the state by saving money and materials and promoting patriotism. See Char Miller, "In the Sweat of Our Brow: Citizenship in American Domestic Practice during WWII—Victory Gardens," *Journal of American Culture* 26, no. 3 (Sept. 2003): 395–409.

[32] José E. Nieves, "Siembra de árboles frutales," *El Heraldo de La Plata* 1, no. 3 (Sept. 1944): 8, box 1, folder 74, Mennonite Board of Missions Overseas Ministries Puerto Rico Field Records 1942–1966, MCUSA. Translation by the author.

[33] Newsletter of the La Plata Sub-Unit of the Martin G. Brumbaugh Reconstruction Unit 1, no. 3 (Oct. 1943): 3–4, box 3, folder 68, Mennonite Board of Missions Overseas Ministries Puerto Rico Field Records 1942–1966, MCUSA.

[34] Ezra Peachy, "Problems of the 'Campesino,'" *Gospel Herald*, Aug. 22, 1950, box 3, folder 46, Mennonite Board of Missions Overseas Ministries Puerto Rico Field Records 1942–1966, MCUSA.

[35] Kermit Eby, "Faith, Hope, and Heifers: The Early History of Heifer Project," reprinted from the *Brethren Messenger*, Nov. 24, 1951, box 31, folder 2, Dan West Papers, Brethren Historical Library and Archives (Elgin, IL); Holsinger, *Serving Rural Puerto Rico*, 149. The shipments of heifers to Puerto

Rico were the pilot project for Heifers for Relief, which eventually became Heifer International, now a global nonprofit well known throughout the world of international development. Mennonite Central Committee, "Seagoing Cowboys and the Heifer Project," https://civilianpublicservice.org/storycontinues/heiferproject (accessed Apr. 28, 2022).

[36] Peachy, "Problems of the 'Campesino'"; Melvin H. Lauver to Glenn Esh, Apr. 29, 1948, box 1, folder 1, Mennonite Board of Missions Overseas Ministries Puerto Rico Field Records 1942–1966, MCUSA; Melvin H. Lauver to J.J. Hansaker, Jan. 16, 1948, box 1, folder 1, Mennonite Board of Missions Overseas Ministries Puerto Rico Field Records 1942–1966, MCUSA.

[37] José E. Nieves, "Importancia de la vaca lechera," *El Heraldo de La Plata*, vol. 1, no. 5 (Jan. 1945): 6–7, box 1, folder 74, Mennonite Board of Missions Overseas Ministries Puerto Rico Field Records 1942–1966, MCUSA. Translation by the author.

[38] Tomás H. Quiñones, "Porque es Ventajosa la Crianza del Cerdo en Puerto Rico," *El Heraldo de La Plata*, vol. 1, no. 5 (Jan. 1945): 6–7, box 1, folder 74, Mennonite Board of Missions Overseas Ministries Puerto Rico Field Records 1942–1966, MCUSA. Translation by the author.

[39] Lauver to Hansaker, Jan. 16, 1948; Lauver to Esh, Apr. 29, 1948.

[40] Holsinger, *Serving Rural Puerto Rico*, 145–147.

[41] Ayala and Bergad, 105; Levy, 22–24.

[42] Justus Holsinger to Frank Harman, Nov. 10, 1948, box 1, folder 1, Mennonite Board of Missions Overseas Ministries Puerto Rico Field Records 1942–1966, MCUSA.

[43] Holsinger and Holsinger, *Puerto Rico: Island of Progress*, 105.

[44] La Plata Mennonite Project Annual Report (1949), box 2, folder 36, Mennonite Board of Missions Overseas Ministries Puerto Rico Field Records 1942–1966, MCUSA; La Plata Mennonite Project Annual Report (1950), box 2, folder 36, Mennonite Board of Missions Overseas Ministries Puerto Rico Field Records 1942–1966, MCUSA; Holsinger and Holsinger, *Puerto Rico: Island of Progress*, 137.

[45] Holsinger, *Serving Rural Puerto Rico*, 69–70.

[46] Peachy, "Problems of the 'Campesino'"; Holsinger, *Serving Rural Puerto Rico*, 150.

[47] Holsinger, *Serving Rural Puerto Rico*, 122; Holsinger and Holsinger, *Puerto Rico: Island of Progress*, 146–147; La Plata Mennonite Project Annual Report (1950).

[48] Felipe Hinojosa, *Latino Mennonites: Civil Rights, Faith, and Evangelical Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 36.

[49] The La Plata Project, including the agricultural program, was gradually dissolved over 1958 and its properties disbursed. "Puerto Rico Executive Committee Meeting," Jan. 8, 1958, box 1, folder 85, Mennonite Board of Missions Overseas Ministries Puerto Rico Field Records 1942–1966, MCUSA.

[50] Holsinger and Holsinger, *Puerto Rico: Island of Progress*, 102–106, 137. Aibonito remained the largest producer of poultry in Puerto Rico as of 2012. "Table 42: Poultry on Farms: 2012 and 2007," *2012 Census of Agriculture: Puerto Rico Island and Municipio Data*, vol. 1, part 52 (June 2014), 116, http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Online_Resources/County_Profiles/Puerto_Rico/cppr009.pdf (accessed Dec. 16, 2021).

[51] Holsinger, *Mennonite Work in Puerto Rico*, 34–36; Holsinger and Holsinger, *Puerto Rico: Island of Progress*, 106–107, 137–138. Miller's plant, established

in 1958, became To-Ricos, Inc., which remains "the only processing industry for fresh chickens" in Puerto Rico today. Pilgrim's, "Puerto Rico," https://www.pilgrims.com/location/puerto-rico/ (accessed Dec. 17, 2021).

[52] Holsinger and Holsinger, *Puerto Rico: Island of Progress*, 137.

[53] Holsinger, *Mennonite Work in Puerto Rico*, 34.

[54] Gustavo A. Martínez et al., "Phosphorus Status of Soils from the Poultry Zone in Puerto Rico," *Journal of Agriculture of the University of Puerto Rico* 83, no. 1–2 (Jan.–Apr. 1999): 15–16.

[55] Peachy, "Problems of the 'Campesino.'"

[56] Derek H. Alderman, "When an Exotic Becomes a Native: Taming, Naming, and Kudzu as Regional Symbolic Capital," *Southeastern Geographer* 55, no. 1 (2015): 37–41.

[57] Nathan Koenig, *A Comprehensive Agricultural Program for Puerto Rico* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1953), 125, 133.

[58] U. S. Allison et al., "Soil Conservation: Observational Investigations," *Report of the Federal Experiment Station in Puerto Rico, 1945* (Washington, DC: USDA, Mar. 1946), 59; U. S. Allison et al., "Soil Conservation: Observational Investigations," *Report of the Federal Experiment Station in Puerto Rico, 1946* (Washington, DC: USDA, Nov. 1947), 51. See also Emery A. Telford and Norman F. Childers, "Tropical Kudzu in Puerto Rico," *Circular No. 27 of the Federal Experiment Station in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico* (Washington, DC: USDA, Mar. 1947).

[59] Peachy, "Problems of the 'Campesino'"; Holsinger, *Serving Rural Puerto Rico*, 150; La Plata Mennonite Project Annual Report (1948), box 2, folder 36, Mennonite Board of Missions Overseas Ministries Puerto Rico Field Records 1942–1966, MCUSA.

[60] Alderman, 41–42.

[61] Holsinger, *Serving Rural Puerto Rico*, 55, 61–63, 67–70, 201; La Plata Mennonite Project Annual Report (1948).

[62] Holsinger, *Serving Rural Puerto Rico*, 194. In the years between 1910 and 1950, the Catholic population of Puerto Rico ranged between 94 and 100 percent, according to Pew Research. See the table titled "Catholic Affiliation in Latin America," Pew Research Center, "Religion in Latin America: Widespread Change in a Historically Catholic Region," Nov. 13, 2014, https://www.pewforum.org/2014/11/13/religion-in-latin-america/#history-of-religious-change (accessed Dec. 18, 2020).

[63] Antonio Sotomayor, "The Triangle of Empire: Sport, Religion, and Imperialism in Puerto Rico's YMCA, 1898–1926," *The Americas* 74, no. 4 (Oct. 2017): 482. Sotomayor examines how the mission of one particular Protestant group, the YMCA, was tied to the United States' wider imperial agenda in Puerto Rico in the decades following the US occupation of the island. See also Felipe Hinojosa, "Latina/o Religious Politics," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History* (published online Apr. 26, 2018). Hinojosa notes that among Protestant missionaries to Puerto Rico, Pentecostals made the most inroads.

[64] Holsinger and Holsinger, *Puerto Rico: Island of Progress*, 137, 142–146.

[65] Paul A. Rodell, "International Voluntary Services in Vietnam: War and the Birth of Activism, 1958–1967," *Peace & Change* 27, no. 2 (Apr. 2002), 226.

[66] David Ekbladh and Daniel Immerwahr have argued that IVS served as an influence for these programs, and David Hollinger has traced this history

with regard to the Peace Corps more thoroughly. See Ekbladh, 177, 192, 203; Immerwahr, 140; and Hollinger, 252–253, 261–265.

[67] As one example of such efforts, see Mary Roldán, "Popular Cultural Action, Catholic Transformation, and Development in Colombia before Vatican II," in *Local Church, Global Church: Catholic Activism in Latin America from Rerum Novarum to Vatican II*, ed. Stephen J.C. Anders and Julia G. Young (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2016): 245–274. Roldán traces the history of Acción Cultural Popular, a Colombian community development project with roots in Catholic social doctrine, arguing that Cold War–era secular development policies "often carried the imprint" of Catholic doctrines, institutions, and individuals who collaborated with state actors. On Protestant groups' involvement in global development efforts during the postwar and Cold War eras, see Fischer-Tiné, "The YMCA and Low-Modernist Rural Development in South Asia, c.1922–1957."

[68] Immerwahr, 4.

[69] Holsinger and Holsinger, *Puerto Rico: Island of Progress*, 140–141, 144–145, 149, 168.

[70] Déborah Berman Santana, "Puerto Rico's Operation Bootstrap: Colonial Roots of a Persistent Model for 'Third World' Development," *Revista Geográfica*, no. 124 (Jan.-Dec. 1998): 87–116; Ayala and Bernabe, 179–200.

[71] Lorek, 110–112, 129–130; Burrows, 312.

[72] Ayala and Bernabe, 153.

[73] Holsinger and Holsinger, *Puerto Rico: Island of Progress*, 144–145, 167–169.

[74] Loramy Conradi Gerstbauer, "The Whole Story of NGO Mandate Change: The Peacebuilding Work of World Vision, Catholic Relief Services, and Mennonite Central Committee," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 39, no. 5 (2010): 856–860.