Summer 2017

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“We Like Mexican Laborers Better”: Citizenship and Immigration Policies in the Formation of Puerto Rican Farm Labor in the United States

Ismael García-Colón

ABSTRACT
This paper examines how colonialism and immigration policies define the citizenship of Puerto Rican farmworkers in relation to guestworker programs. The Jones Act created in practice an ambiguous status for Puerto Rican migrants by granting U.S. citizenship to colonial subjects in a time when citizenship still meant being White and Anglophone. In addition, the importation of Mexican braceros tended to shape people’s perceptions of farmworkers as “foreign.” Puerto Ricans were and are constantly asked, challenged, and suspected by mainstream society of being “illegal aliens.” These perceptions had a lasting effect through World War II, the H-2 Program, and apple growers’ resistance to the use of Puerto Rican workers during the 1970s. The study of the formation of the Puerto Rican farm labor force offers a unique opportunity to explore how U.S. colonialism, the political economy of agriculture, and low-wage labor are related to projects of citizenship and immigration. [Keywords: Farmworkers, labor, agriculture, citizenship, immigration, deportation]
Introduction

The Puerto Rican experience in farm labor challenges our understanding of U.S. citizenship and its relation to immigration policies regarding guestwork. A recent case illustrates the complexity of Puerto Ricans’ role in farm labor in the mainland U.S. On January 5, 2015, Charlene Rachor, regional director of the Wage and Hour Division of the U.S. Department of Labor, announced charges against Cassaday Farms in southern New Jersey for unlawfully rejecting 13 qualified Puerto Rican workers who had applied for seasonal employment. Cassaday Farms had shown preferential treatment to guestworkers in violation of the regulations of the H-2A visa program. Farms hiring workers through the H2A program are required to recruit U.S. workers first and offer the same wages and working conditions to U.S. workers as to H-2A workers. The farm had allegedly provided wages and working conditions less favorable to the Puerto Rican workers than guestworkers without maintaining all required records. The owners agreed to pay $57,870 in civil penalties and $117,130 in back wages in order to settle the charges (Forand 2015). The Cassaday Farm case is one of many that demonstrate how employers’ legal ability to deport a large segment of farmworkers (guestworkers and undocumented workers) has rendered another segment (Puerto Ricans and other U.S. citizens) less desirable for agricultural work.

Nowadays, Puerto Rican farmworkers are imperfect migrants for the majority of agricultural employers. Guestworkers and undocumented workers have become, what Cindy Hahamovitch (2003) calls “perfect immigrants” for an agrarian labor regime characterized by a low-wage, deportable, seasonal, mobile, and easily replaceable labor force. Being less desirable for agriculture
does not imply that Puerto Rican workers are in a worse position than
guestworkers or that being a guestworker is a privileged position. Rather, this
article emphasizes the long history of ironies and contradictions in the ways
that farmers and government officials have acted in regard to farm labor.

Puerto Rican migration to U.S. farms has grown and shrunk as a result
of immigration policies and guestworker programs (see Figure 1). In 1948,
Puerto Rican workers began to migrate to the Northeast through contracts
sponsored by the Puerto Rico Farm Labor Program under the Migration
Division of the Puerto Rico Department of Labor. The Puerto Rico Farm
Labor Program was in charge of recruiting, arranging contracts for, and
transporting workers from Puerto Rico to the mainland United States (Lapp
1990). By promoting migration and assisting workers, the government sought
to eliminate unemployment on the islands while feeding the postwar labor
demands of U.S. employers. The U.S. colonial status offered an important
tool to the government of Puerto Rico to shape the migratory flows and
the formation of Puerto Rican communities (García-Colón 2008). Colonial
officials forced federal agencies and elected officials to pay attention to migrant
farmworkers. The end of the Bracero Program and restrictions on H-2 workers
increased the use of Puerto Rican farmworkers throughout the United States.
Puerto Rican farmworkers in the mainland United States constituted more
than 60,000 workers per year at the peak of their migration during the late
1960s and early 1970s (Morales 1986). They migrated because of their desire
to earn a living with better pay and stability. During the mid-1970s, apple
growers were successful in stopping the preference for Puerto Rican workers
over H-2 workers. In 1975, this situation contributed enormously to the
decrease of Puerto Rican migrant contract farmworkers (see Figure 1). Still,
despite discrimination and shrinking numbers, contemporary Puerto Ricans
continue their quest for earning a living by working in U.S. agriculture (García-
Colón and Meléndez 2013).

Studies of Puerto Rican farmworkers in the United States have focused
on racial discrimination and social problems encountered by migrants,
unionization and organizing, the failures of contract labor, emigration as a
development strategy, the role of gender ideologies and domesticity, and their
migration as form of transnationalism (Bonilla Santiago 1986; Duany 2011;
Findlay 2014; Nieves Falcón 1975; Rivera 1979; Stinson Fernández 1996;
Valdés 1991). What is missing from these studies is a sense of the formation
of Puerto Rican farmworkers in relation to the formation of Puerto Rico as
a modern colony of the United States and the development of immigration
policies in the United States. Other studies have examined how the colonial
relationship and citizenship of Puerto Ricans and immigrant status of Mexican
shape their convergence in workplaces and neighborhoods. Lilia Fernández
(2010) describes how despite Puerto Ricans and Mexicans being pitted against
each other, their common sense of exploitation and discrimination transcends
explore how the unequal politics of citizenship results in different relations
between Puerto Ricans and Mexicans to the U.S. state. Drawing on their
contributions, I expand and explore the long history of U.S. farm labor policies
and immigration laws affecting Puerto Rican migrant farmworkers.

In the case of Puerto Rican migrant farmworkers, one must consider
how colonialism allowed the insertion of government officials from Puerto
Rico in the structures of the U.S. Department of Labor, the creation of the
Migration Division as a Puerto Rican agency operating in the United States,
and lobbying on behalf of Puerto Rico by congressional representatives and
officials of the Office of Territories and its preceding agency, the Bureau of
Insular Affairs. North American governors in Puerto Rico, such as Rexford
G. Tugwell (1941–1946), sought to persuade the federal government to use
Puerto Rican workers in other parts of the United States when the federal
government sought to bring Mexican and West Indian guestworkers. Puerto
Rico’s government officials collaborated with federal officials by overseeing
the hiring, transportation, and performance of migrant farmworkers.
Migrants from modern colonies are distinctive because they share the citizenship of the metropolitan population, enjoying free mobility within the metropolitan countries.

The successful insertion of Puerto Rico’s officials in the sphere of the federal government was due to the rise of modern colonialism. Between 1941 and 1952, Puerto Rico experienced a process of social, economic, and political change that transformed it into a modern colony. World War II and the Cold War created a consensus among the different agencies of the federal government that sought to grant autonomy to the local government of Puerto Rico while further incorporating Puerto Ricans into U.S. domestic and foreign policy (García-Colón 2006, 2009). Migrants from modern colonies are distinctive because they share the citizenship of the metropolitan population, enjoying free mobility within the metropolitan countries. Algerian and French Caribbean migrants in France, Dutch Caribbean peoples in the Netherlands, and British colonial subjects in the United Kingdom are some of the examples of similar colonial migrations (Gonzalez 2006; Grosfoguel 2003; Hahamovitch 2011; Mitchell 2012; Ngai 2004). Local colonial administrations organized or fostered the migration of these modern colonial subjects. Colonial migrants came mostly from rural areas and were unskilled workers serving a labor market for low-wage workers at the core of the capitalist economies during the economic boom of the postwar years (Grosfoguel 2003, 178, 180; Pierre-Charles 1979).

In the following sections, I explore how the use of Puerto Ricans in U.S. agriculture depended greatly on their membership status within the U.S. nation. As U.S. nationals and not citizens, Puerto Ricans migrated to other U.S. territories such as Hawaii and Cuba (1899-1917). The granting of naturalized U.S. citizenship in 1917 (until 1941) facilitated the recruitment of Puerto Ricans for the mainland, but began to mark their undesirability because of their lack of deportability status. By 1941, their status as “native-born” intensified the lobbying of Puerto Rico’s government officials for their inclusion in the wartime effort to maintain a sustainable agricultural production (Venator Santiago 2013). However, it was only in the 1950s that Puerto Ricans became fully recognized as domestic workers for purposes of labor market regulations and recruitment. The Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1952 officially classified workers from Puerto Rico as domestic, giving
them nominal preference over temporary immigrants for purposes of the guestworkers’ H-2 visa program. In practice, the fact that the U.S. citizenship was extended to Puerto Ricans meant that Puerto Rican farmworkers were not any more or less affected by U.S. farmers’ preference for guestworkers than African Americans or Tejanos.

Thus, I explore how immigration policies, guestworker programs, colonialism, and the attempts to manage labor migration regimes shaped Puerto Rican farm labor migration. The study of Puerto Rican farmworkers offers a unique opportunity to understand how U.S. colonialism is related to projects of citizenship, deportation, and guestwork.

The Rise of Guestwork and Colonial Migration

After the Spanish-American War, most of the new colonial subjects, including Puerto Ricans, Chamorros, and Filipinos, became U.S. nationals with limited rights and protections. Gatekeeping practices that came to dominate U.S. immigration policies did not apply because U.S. officials were required by international parameters that indicated that colonial subjects be granted free movement within the bounds of the empire, confounding many whose task was to police racial and national borders (Baldoz 2011, 13). Puerto Ricans became “American aliens” (Coudert 1903). By defining Puerto Ricans as U.S. nationals rather than complete aliens, Congress allowed the incorporation of Puerto Ricans into the U.S. labor market. In the first decades of the twentieth century, labor agents recruited thousands of Puerto Ricans to work in the plantations of Hawaii, Arizona, Cuba, Dominican Republic, St. Croix, and Mexico, but the most important waves of Puerto Rican migration as farm labor in the mainland U.S. began in the mid-1940s. At that time, colonial migrants began to replace other flows of labor migration from Asia that were limited by the Chinese Exclusion Act and the Foran Act. Colonial labor migration began as an alternative to lower the labor costs of U.S. agricultural corporations (Baldoz 2011, 45).

In addition, new definitions of citizenship and the expansion of welfare services influenced the incorporation of colonial peoples into the U.S. labor market. Between the 1870s and 1920s, citizenship was emerging as membership in a nation-state that claimed an ethnically and racially homogenous population. Ethnic/racial citizenship also rose during the extension and growth of unemployment insurance and welfare benefits for citizens (Fahrmeir 2007, 89–123; Hahamovitch 2011, 12). In the United States, since its foundation,
being White, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant had been the dominant definition of nationality and, hence, U.S. citizenship. In the early twentieth century, U.S. state and federal governments reinforced the legal requirement of whiteness as a precondition for naturalization. Those immigrants considered white could easily assimilate and become full and first-class U.S. citizens. Of course, popular opinion and scientific opinion sometimes differed, making it difficult to police the boundaries of U.S. citizenship. Non-whites, particularly Asians, were excluded from citizenship, while Mexicans and Eastern and Southern Europeans were regarded with suspicion. By the 1930s, the U.S. and Germany were the only countries whose dominant definitions of citizenship were based on whiteness (Haney López 1996; Smith 1997). In the case of Puerto Ricans in the United States, the tension between treating Puerto Ricans as citizens and treating them as nonwhite became decisive in their place within U.S. farm labor. From 1898 to 1917, U.S. law did not consider Puerto Ricans automatically fit to become U.S. citizens, meaning that they had to apply individually for naturalization (Venator Santiago 2013).

The growth of welfare services led nativists and immigration restrictionists to agitate for more government scrutiny of immigrants and colonial migrants. Because of these pressure groups, and the anti-immigration feelings, governments began devising guestworker programs. In the United States and other parts of the world, guestworker programs rose as an alternative to permanent immigration of “undesirable subjects.” In Prussia, the government designed one of the first schemes that recruited Poles to work in agriculture. South Africa mining companies began to hire seasonal workers from overseas and from other African countries (Gonzalez 2006; Hahamovitch 2011, 12–9; Jung 2006; Lee 2003; Ngai 2004). Modern nation-states began to develop a deportation regime in which the category of illegal alien was at center stage (De Genova and Peutz 2010; Ngai 2004). Thus, guestwork programs pretended to protect ethnic/racial citizenship and the safety net of citizens.

Because of their “citizenship privileges,” they were often excluded or included in recruitment efforts depending on how agricultural interests could maneuver to maintain low labor costs.
Puerto Ricans, as well as African Americans, Asian Americans, Chicanos, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans, became second-class citizens expendable and disposable depending on the demands of the labor market due to the anxieties of nativists and racists. Because of their “citizenship privileges,” they were often excluded or included in recruitment efforts depending on how agricultural interests could maneuver to maintain low labor costs. Temporary migration of colonial subjects also represented an alternative for employers who were trying to circumvent anti-immigrant regulations and feelings.

The status of colonial migrants caused and still causes confusion to nativists and those in charge of policing the boundaries of citizenship. Since colonial migrants could qualify for poor relief and other forms of welfare, it provoked the objections of local authorities and residents in rural areas who fear that they would become a burden for welfare agencies and created a problem for federal authorities and employers trying to foster their migration. In this context, Puerto Ricans’ “right” to stay and use welfare sources deemed them unfit for many agribusinesses and farmers that preferred guestworkers. At the same time, Puerto Ricans, as colonial subjects, began to be treated and viewed as “aliens” because of their mixed racial backgrounds, language, and cultural practices (Ngai 2004). In the process, gatekeeping practices and the deportation regime shaped not only the categories of immigrants and citizens, but also the colonial subjects who occupy an in-between space (Baldoz 2011; Hahamovitch 2011, 12; Lee 2003, 22; Torpey 2000).

The first large effort of transporting Puerto Ricans for farm labor overseas dates from the early 1900s, when workers were recruited and contracted for labor in the islands of Hawaii. This effort preceded the arrival of Filipinos as colonial contract migrants in Hawaii but followed the integration of Chicanos into the U.S. labor market (Beechert 1985, 128–31; Gonzalez 2006; Lasker 1969; Ngai 2004, 101–2; Rosario Natal 2001). The migration of Puerto Ricans to Hawaii was not an isolated event. When Hawaii was annexed to the United States in 1898, the U.S. Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was immediately applied. Taking advantage of the exclusion of Chinese immigrants, Japanese workers staged a strike against sugar cane planters during the critical planting and gridding season and succeeded in raising the wages of field hands from 60 to 76 cents. Now, with the arrival of Puerto Rican workers, competition reduced the bargaining power of the Japanese workers and increased the sugar corporations’ leverage (History Task Force 1982, 63; Rosario Natal 2001, 106–8).
During the late 1910s, the California Growers Exchange lobbied U.S. government officials for a relaxed immigration policy for foreign workers. Since nativist fears had defeated their possibilities of obtaining Chinese workers, some growers proposed the use of Mexican, West Indian, and Puerto Rican workers. The 1917 immigration act allowed for the importation of contract workers and suspended the literacy test for these workers (Daniel 1982, 66–7; Gonzalez 1994, 27–8; McWilliams 1999, 124–30; Scruggs 1960). The federal government facilitated the entrance of Mexican workers, who were perceived as less organized than Japanese workers.

World War I paved the way to further incorporation of Puerto Ricans into the labor market. On March 2, 1917, the U.S. government granted U.S. citizenship to Puerto Ricans, encouraging their recruitment. The need for workers, added to concerns for the loyalty of Puerto Ricans within the war in case of an enemy invasion, outweighed the fears of incorporating racially unfit colonial subjects to the benefits of U.S. citizenship (Franqui Rivera 2013). The U.S. Employment Service with the support of the Bureau of Insular Affairs began to hire Puerto Ricans to work on the mainland. Governor Arthur Yager (1913–1921) together with some politicians initially opposed migrant labor recruitment, but later favored it because of the conditions of poverty in Puerto Rico. In October 1917, the U.S. Department of Labor began recruiting Puerto Rican workers for war-related industries. By July 1918, more than 18,000 workers had participated in the program. Many of these workers were sugar cane workers. The sometimes deadly labor and living conditions in the camps led to many problems and complaints (Marcus 1919; Marín Román 2009, 507–9; Paralitici 2006, 164–5; Rojas N.D.).

Further immigration restrictions embodied in the Johnson Act of 1921 and the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 drastically reduced immigration, fostering more opportunities for Puerto Ricans to migrate (Baldoz 2011, 60, 253 n 1; Cruz 1998, 3). The Johnson-Reed Act specifically defined Puerto Rico as part of the United States. Puerto Rican officials and members of the Bureau of Insulars Affairs lobbied federal officials in the U.S. Labor Department and Congress to prefer Puerto Rican workers. In the fiscal year of 1926–1927, the net migration from Puerto Rico to the United States registered 8,729 people, the largest in the first 40 years of U.S. occupation (Perloff 1950 cited in History Task Force 1982, 222).

In the 1920s, Puerto Rican contract workers were again hired to work in agriculture in Arizona and Hawaii. The experience of Arizona was a disaster
for both growers and workers. Puerto Rican workers found that the conditions did not match the promises made by contractors. Because migrants were not deportable, when their expectations were not met they tended to leave their jobs and move to nearby cities, often becoming indigent and sometimes engaging in crime (Lasker 1969; Rosario Natal 2001). Growers’ associations and government officials who favored Mexican workers began a campaign against Puerto Rican workers. They feared proposals to stop Mexican labor from coming in favor of Filipinos, who were still American nationals, and Puerto Ricans, who were U.S. citizens (Beechert 1985, 131, 209; History Task Force 1982, 144–93; Rosario Natal 2001; U.S. House 1928, 187–8; U.S. Senate 1928, 43). In 1927, the Convention of the Fruit Growers of California discussed the choice between encouraging the migration of Mexican versus Puerto Rican migrant laborers. One of the group’s officials stated that:

…we cannot handle them like Mexicans. A Porto Rican has much right to stay as we have. He cannot be exported as can a Mexican who becomes indigent… As you know, the Mexican likes the sunshine against the adobe wall with a few tortillas and in the off-time he drifts across the border where he may have these things. ... The Mexicans can be deported if they become county charges, but the others are here to stay and they are less efficient. (cited in Anderson 1940, 296)

Growers’ and farmers’ associations feared that Puerto Ricans could contest rights violations or become a charge for welfare agencies. Growers in the West and Southwest opposed the use of Puerto Rican labor (U.S. House 1930).

From 1928 to 1930, U.S. Congress members John Box of Texas and William Harris of Georgia introduced several bills to include countries in the Western Hemisphere under immigration quotas. Box and Harris sought to restrict nonwhite immigrants coming from Mexico. Since restricting Mexican migration would mean that the only sources for farm labor from outside the mainland United States would be the Philippines and Puerto Rico, growers began to express their contempt for Filipino and Puerto Rican migrant workers. In the Congressional hearings, growers, Congress members, and Puerto Rico’s Resident Commissioner debated for and against the use of Puerto Rican labor. Those opposed cited high transportation costs, racial inferiority, welfare dependence, and the failures of prior migrations to Hawaii and Arizona as the justification to bar Puerto Ricans from entering the United States (Baldoz 2011, 164; U.S. House 1930; U.S. Senate 1928). The U.S.
citizenship of Puerto Ricans and the political status of Puerto Rico deterred Congress from restricting the use of Puerto Rican labor. Although these bills failed in Congress, deportation, nativism, and proposals for immigration restriction began to rise with the beginning of the Great Depression. Unable to set quotas on Mexicans, the U.S. government reduced their visas, increased penalties for undocumented immigration, and reinforced border surveillance (Molina 2014, 58–9).

Meanwhile Puerto Rican veterans, former contract workers, and those willing to venture were finding their ways to new places and opportunities throughout United States. The census of 1930 recorded 52,774 Puerto Rican-born people living in the United States, up from 11,811 in 1920 (Senior and Watkins 1966, 701). By the late 1920s, the Puerto Rico Department of Labor had recorded 7,000 Puerto Ricans migrating to New York City. In its annual report of 1930, the Puerto Rico Department of Labor exhorted the local legislative assembly to ask the U.S. Congress to facilitate emigration by allowing Puerto Rican recent graduates to travel by military transport to the mainland (History Task Force 1982, 206–9). Puerto Ricans were still present in the farm labor force despite growers’ and their allies’ refusal to import Puerto Rican workers. In 1932, Puerto Rican workers were part of a spontaneous strike of pea pickers in central California (Bronfenbrenner 1990; Daniel 1982, 129). Although Governor Robert Hayes Gore of Puerto Rico (1933–1934) attempted to bring Puerto Rican farmworkers to Florida in the mid-1930s, the economic situation in the United States was not favorable for labor contract migration for Puerto Rican workers. Mexican workers were being deported and Filipinos were “repatriated” because high unemployment rendered labor migrants unnecessary and created a more hostile climate for workers (see Baldoz 2011, 186–93; Ngai 2004).

The 1940s and the Era of Managing Migration
In the United States, the outbreak of the Second War allowed growers and small farmers to influence food policy by imposing their preference for guestworkers. In 1942, U.S. growers were complaining about the possibility of losing their crops if a labor shortage would happen. They were able to convince federal officials that the country needed the importation of guestworkers as part of the war effort (Galarza 1964, 41; Kirstein 1977, 18, 49). Between 1943 and 1947, the federal government enacted different laws that ensured the supply of foreign workers and created the Bracero Program, impeding the importation
of Puerto Rican workers (Kirstein 1977, 49). Mexican, Canadian, and West Indians were brought as guestworkers to the United States under contracts sponsored by the U.S. government and facilitated by their respective nations. The federal government provided transportation costs for braceros but denied the same benefits to domestic workers such as Puerto Ricans. The irony was that in 1941, Congress had passed an amendment declaring Puerto Ricans “native-born” citizens (Venator Santiago 2013). In this context, Governor Rexford G. Tugwell of Puerto Rico intervened and a limited number of Puerto Ricans were hired. However, an expanded role for the government of Puerto Rico in farm labor migration was possible only after the end of the war.

During the postwar years, Puerto Ricans became an accessible labor force for U.S. industries and federal projects. Immigration from European countries halted and Puerto Ricans were an excellent option in the demand for labor (Grosfoguel 2003, 180). From 1944 to 1949, the Puerto Rico Department of Labor began to turn its attention to the unorganized emigration of Puerto Ricans to the United States (PRDL 1947). In his annual report of 1945–1946, the Commissioner of Labor recommended the expansion of the Employment Service so that its scope could include the study and supervision of migration (PRDL 1948, 9–10).

At the same time, private employment agencies in the Northeast began to hire Puerto Rican farmworkers. Their business was lucrative because airlines paid a commission for every ticket sold to migrants. The immediate result was that more workers were being recruited without jobs to fill. Some migrants worked short periods of time that didn’t allow them to pay their living costs. Migrants began to write about their problems to their relatives and the government of Puerto Rico. This situation led to the government of Puerto Rico to intervene. In 1946, officials found that agents were making substantial profits at the expense of workers who were paying inflated prices for transportation, clothing, and food (Lapp 1990, 60, 63, 117–8; Pagán de Colón 1956, 5–6).

During these years, Congress was examining the Bracero Program. In
April 1947, concerns about unemployment in the country after the Second War led Congress to pass Public Law 40, which intended to eliminate the importation of foreign labor (Kirstein 1977, 58). Although the Bracero Program was renewed again in 1948, Law 40 placed the U.S. Farm Placement Program under the U.S. Employment Service (Goot 1949, 44; Kirstein 1977, 66). Puerto Rican government officials were paying important attention to these changes and making the necessary changes to promote and manage migration to the United States.

On May 9, 1947, the government of Puerto Rico enacted Public Law 89 requiring contracts and government approval when hiring workers in its jurisdiction and leading to the creation of the Puerto Rico Farm Labor Program under the Department of Labor (Asamblea Legislativa 1947a). Using the experiences of the Bracero Program, private labor recruitment, the U.S. Employment Service, and the Farm Security Administration, the government of Puerto Rico designed a farm labor program that included the hiring, transportation, and supervision of Puerto Rican farmworkers (Senior 1947, 52-53; Sierra Berdecía 1948). The Puerto Rican Farm Labor Program resembles the Bracero Program in its organization and attempts to micromanage the migration of farmworkers.

In the fall of 1947, Governor Jesus T. Piñero assigned Fernando Sierra Berdecía, the Commissioner of Labor, to study and make recommendations about the situation of migrant workers in the United States. Sierra Berdecía proposed that workers could be hired after the sugar harvest in Puerto Rico when unemployment was higher; he also recommended that women could migrate as domestic employees. He suggested the reorganization of the Employment Service Office and the establishment of offices in the mainland. On December 5, 1947, the Puerto Rican legislature followed these suggestions by approving Public Law 25, creating the Bureau of Employment and Migration with its Migration Division (Asamblea Legislativa 1947a, 1947b; Lapp 1990, 117–8; Pagán de Colón 1956, 6–8; Whalen 2001, 68). The Migration Division took charge of administering the Farm Labor Program. It sought to manage the flow of migrant farm workers. It negotiated an annual contract with farmers and arranged transportation for migrant workers (Stinson Fernández 1996, 124).

One of the most significant roles of the Migration Division was to lobby the federal government to encourage the recruitment of Puerto Ricans in preference to foreign workers. In 1949, Robert Goodwin, Director of the U.S.
Employment Service, and Commissioner Sierra Berdecia made an agreement clarifying the inclusion of Puerto Rico in the clearance procedures of U.S. Employment Service to determine the need for foreign workers. The purpose of this agreement was to recruit Puerto Ricans when local labor was not available (Goot 1949, 67). Puerto Rico became part of the federal exchange system of employment services that had been created by the Wagner-Peyser Act of 1933. The Puerto Rico Bureau of Employment and Migration also obtained funding from the U.S. Employment Service in order to recruit Puerto Rican farmworkers (Lapp 1990, 118–9).

In 1951, when the federal government reorganized the U.S. Employment Service under the U.S. Bureau of Employment and Security, the Puerto Rico Bureau of Employment and Migration became its Puerto Rican branch. The Migration Division, as the representative of the Puerto Rico Department of Labor in the U.S., gained more power in developing and administering the Farm Labor Program (Lapp 1990, 175).

Despite these developments, there was intense resistance from some
farmers, but the government of Puerto Rico, aided by H. L. Mitchell from the Southern Tenant Farmers Union and representatives of the Consumer League, lobbied the federal government to recruit Puerto Rican workers. U.S. Senator Dennis Chavez from New Mexico submitted legislation and advocated in behalf of Puerto Rican workers. In the 1951 U.S. Senate hearings for the Federal Security Agency’s 1952 appropriations, Chavez scolded U.S. Secretary of Labor Maurice J. Tobin for not fostering the use of Puerto Rican workers. He said:

We have conferences here on pan-Americanism, and on this and that; but we neglect to do anything about giving work to our own Puerto Rican citizens who are willing to die and some do die for their country, just because we may want to import some workers from Jamaica or Mexico or elsewhere. It is a little beyond my comprehension. (U.S. Senate 1951)

Chavez was not the only ally of the government of Puerto Rico. Frederick Crawford, a Republican member of the U.S. House Representatives from Michigan, supported the Puerto Rican government’s efforts for labor migration. He helped broker “Operation Farmlift,” which transported more than 5,000 Puerto Rican workers to Michigan but ended in mismanagement and failure for the government of Puerto Rico (see Findlay 2014; Valdés 1991).

Despite these efforts, Puerto Rican government officials continuously confronted the fact that employers and local, state and federal official, perceived Puerto Ricans as foreign workers who would displace local workers from their jobs (Pagán de Colón 1956, 13). Employers, government officials, and even journalists referred to them as alien or foreign (Duany 2011, 90). Other growers continue opposing Puerto Ricans because they were citizens and could not be sent back. In a 1950 congressional hearing on farm labor, Keith Mets, president of the Imperial Valley Farmers’ Association, stated that,

In our area we feel that Puerto Rican labor would not be practical. We like Mexican laborers better... when it is over they go back home, to Mexico, don’t furnish a social problem of relief. If we bring Puerto Ricans in, and they stay, there might be a social problem. (U.S. Senate 1951, 175)

As a result of the lobbying efforts of the government of Puerto Rico with the U.S. Department of Labor, Connecticut’s farmers were forced to hire Puerto Rican workers, but they made clear their preference for workers who
could be deported. In 1952, Ralph C. Lasbury Jr., the director of the Shade Tobacco Growers Agricultural Association stated that Puerto Ricans were only being brought in at the request of the federal government and despite their preference for guestworkers. For Lasbury, the British West Indians provided growers with a work force that could be supervised and bound by immigration regulation so that any person causing trouble could be deported and barred from re-entry (Editorial 1952, 23).

For example, a district attorney in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, complained to government officials in 1952 that Puerto Rican workers would stay in towns and cities after the harvest; he wanted the government to send them back to Puerto Rico. Contradictorily, some employers and officials treated Puerto Ricans as deportable immigrants. For example, a district attorney in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, complained to government officials in 1952 that Puerto Rican workers would stay in towns and cities after the harvest; he wanted the government to send them back to Puerto Rico (Senior 1952). Confusion about the boundaries of citizenship and immigration law together with nativism, racism and xenophobia led to cases such as this one.

U.S. colonialism and citizenship created in practice an ambiguous status for Puerto Ricans, particularly in the early twentieth century when citizenship still meant being White and Anglophone. Racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural differences gave Puerto Rican farmworkers a special vulnerability to the dominant notions and practices of citizenship and immigration. Resistance from local authorities and population to their arrival as migrant workers was also about their lack of whiteness. In addition, employers who favored deportable migrants used racist language to express their preference over Puerto Ricans. Discrimination against Puerto Ricans in farmwork because of their “foreignness” continued to occur even though Congress passed the Nationality Act of 1940 and an amendment to it in 1948 clarifying the “native-born” citizenship status of people born in Puerto Rico (Venator Santiago 2013). Since 1917, U.S. citizenship for Puerto Ricans regardless of “native-born” status or not meant the same for U.S. officials and the general population. As Mae M. Ngai mentions, Puerto Ricans are “alien citizens,” or U.S.-born citizens who are presumed to be foreign by the mainstream society
and at times by state officials (2004, 2). Thus the Puerto Rican experience as U.S. citizens in rural areas and agricultural fields is the same as that of Asian and Latino farmworkers being considered as unassimilable foreigners.

Workers were not only treated as not citizens, but in many instances they felt like foreigners. The government of Puerto Rico recognized the feelings of estrangement that workers confronted when it enacted Public Law 25 creating the Migration Division (Asamblea Legislativa 1947b; Lapp 1990, 173–4). This law established the Puerto Rican government’s official migration policy. The preamble of the law stated:

The Government of Puerto Rico neither encourages nor discourages the migration of Puerto Rican workmen [sic] to the United States or any foreign country; but it considers its duty ... to provide the proper guidance with respect to opportunities for employment and the problems of adjustment usually encountered in environments which are ethnologically alien. (Asamblea Legislativa 1947b, 386)

The recognition that the mainland United States was an ethnologically alien place for migrants resulted from the complaints of migrants during previous attempts to use Puerto Rican workers in U.S. agriculture.

The government of Puerto Rico held orientations for farmers and managers in order to promote the use of Puerto Rican workers, but more important, to foster employers’ understanding of workers and their feelings. In a conference for farmers, Carlos Martinez, Director of the Migration Division’s Camden Office, indicated that,

Our men respond to good treatment…. I am not here to make excuses for shirkers, but I say that if they are treated right, these are as good as any other workers. … Community problems occur … when these men are brought here to strange surrounding, and they must be solved in the community… these men do not know the customs of this country and their ways often seems strange in the new land…. You farmers must realize that many times these men are flown up here to a strange land in the dark night and by morning are in the farmer's fields ready for work. There is no time for any sort of adjustment. The Puerto Rican is plunged into a strange environment with not even the advantage of a common language among these strangers. (N.J. Department of Labor 1957, 4-5)

Making sure that farmers cooperated in ameliorating workers’ feelings of
estrangement was important in order to entice workers to continue to migrate and thereby assure the constant flow of new workers.

Workers’ perceptions of being like prisoners was also shaped by the way some farmers treated them. In 1957, a Puerto Rican migrant farmworker complaining about mistreatment on a farm wrote to Puerto Rico’s Governor Luis Muñoz Marín:

I am sure that when we left Puerto Rico we were not prisoners or animals. My opinion is that migrants have rights and that we have the right that the government defend us like any U.S. citizens. You know that we left Puerto Rico as friends and not as enemies…. This is why there are many crimes in the fields and workers’ revolutions. Because the farmers think that we are obligated to be prisoners… (Ramos 1957—author’s translation)

The labor regime in the farms with their fields and camps was unbearable for workers accustomed to work with the protection of labor unions, Puerto Rico’s political bosses, and the paternalism of landowners.

Workers also experienced racism outside the camps. There were establishments that did not serve Puerto Ricans or kept them apart from the white public. Black Puerto Ricans experienced even more prejudice. Rafael, a migrant farmworker during the 1950s, told me of an incident in Delaware when he and other workers stopped to rest on a trip from Florida to New Jersey:

…we went into a small cafeteria. There was a black guy from Vieques with us. When we sat down, the waitress said, “that guy has to go sit with the other blacks, over there”… But there was a guy sitting in the corner who … spoke Spanish. And he directed the waitress to “serve these five guys here.” … And he said that if she didn’t, he’d “shut down the restaurant.” She asked him, “and who are you?” He said, “I was the sergeant of a Korean War camp and the platoon leader of men like these guys. While you were back here selling your food and enjoying democracy, these guys were offering their lives for you. So you better serve them or I’ll shut down this restaurant.” She shut up and served us.

In the case of Puerto Rican farmworkers, one cannot explain how power and immigration policies shaped their migration without understanding the intricacies of U.S. colonialism, of which citizenship is an integral part.
Despite racial discrimination and exploitation suffered by migrants, the vision of government officials was of a planned migration. Like most state strategies, managing farm labor migration remained an elusive goal, but U.S. colonialism allowed the government of Puerto Rico to become part of federal programs and extend its reach to the rural United States. In the case of Puerto Rican farmworkers, one cannot explain how power and immigration policies shaped their migration without understanding the intricacies of U.S. colonialism, of which citizenship is an integral part. The changes in the U.S. citizenship of Puerto Rican farmworkers from naturalized to “native born” did not make a substantial difference when employers and local officials considered them for agricultural work. However, “native born” citizenship gave Puerto Rican officials legitimacy before federal and state representatives when lobbying for the use of Puerto Rican workers.

The H-2 Program and Puerto Rican Workers
The U.S. Congress reaffirmed the U.S. citizenship to Puerto Ricans in the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1952. This gave Puerto Ricans an official status as domestic workers rather than guestworkers. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952 embodied this policy in a system of H-2 visas. H-2 visas required employers who wished to hire workers from other countries to demonstrate that there were not enough domestic workers available. Following the mandate of the Wagner-Peyser Act of 1933, employers filed job orders with the U.S. Department of Labor, which sent them to state employment offices in states with high unemployment. Before farmers could bring workers from other countries, the U.S. Department of Labor had to certify the farmers’ needs. For example, immigration law forced employers to hire any domestic worker who asked for a job in the first half of the apple-picking season (Associated Press 1983; Cowan 1978, 40–5; Martin 2014, 42–3). The U.S. Department of Labor also had to determine that employment of H-2 workers would not adversely affect the wages of domestic workers (Griffith 1986, 877). The H-2 visa program became the H-2A visa program in 1986 with the enactment of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA).

Since the 1950s, most eastern growers used H-2 labor from Jamaica for the apple and sugar harvests. This program, together with the Mexican Bracero Program, began in 1952 as a supplier of low-wage workers to U.S agriculture (Griffith 1986, 876). In the U.S. Northeast, the Puerto Rican government and the West Indian Program competed for farm jobs in the apple industry.
Figure 4. Chartered flight with Puerto Rican workers. Photo by unknown, circa 1948. Courtesy of Records of the Offices of the Government of Puerto Rico in the United States, Migration Division, Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY.
Figure 5. Puerto Rican migrant farmworkers disembarking in Buffalo, New York. Photo by unknown, circa 1948. Courtesy of Records of the Offices of the Government of Puerto Rico in the United States, Migration Division, Archives of the Puerto Rican Diaspora, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY.
Sugar growers in Louisiana and Florida used Jamaican H-2 workers. Because the Bracero Program encompassed a much larger number of guestworkers, the H-2 program did not receive the same negative attention during the mid-sixties, allowing its survival. The H-2 Program admitted 36,000 guestworkers at its peak in 1965; in comparison, the Bracero Program admitted 500,000 in 1956 (Heppel and Amendola 1992, 30; Levine 2009, 3).

From 1964 to 1984, important changes transformed Puerto Rico’s Farm Labor Program. After the end of the Bracero Program in 1964, the use of domestic farm labor increased (see Graph 1). Puerto Rico’s Farm Labor Program rose to more than 20,000 workers in 1969 (see appendix 1). President Johnson’s Secretary of Labor, Willard Wirtz, restricted the H-2 program to the sugar and apple industries, and considered eliminating the importation of guestworkers altogether. Political pressure from growers, however, continued to allow the importation of Jamaican and other West Indian guestworkers. By the 1970s, H-2 workers from the British Caribbean in the apple industry constituted 5,000 to 6,000 workers per year (Hahamovitch 2014, 23; U.S. Senate 1982, 3).

The decade of the 1970s brought the demise of the Puerto Rico Farm Labor Program. Many U.S. workers returned to the fields in search for work because of high unemployment. In Puerto Rico, the crisis also increased the number of unemployed and the number of return-migrants. These developments reduced the Puerto Rico Farm Labor Program to less than half from 12,700 workers in 1974 to 5600 in 1975 (PRDL n.d.; see appendix 1 and Graph 1). The crisis ignited one of the most important controversies of the Puerto Rico Farm Labor Program.

In 1975, Luis Sepulveda, Acting Assistant Regional Director for the U.S. Manpower Administration, wrote to the Migration Division that Vermont growers were requesting guestworkers but that he would not approve their authorization because of the availability of Puerto Rican workers (Bustelo 1975). The government of Puerto Rico attempted to negotiate with apple growers through the Farm Labor Executive Committee (FLEC), an organization representing growers in New England, New York, Virginia, and West Virginia. However, the government of Puerto Rico’s contract was not acceptable for growers. They took the position that the contract was onerous, and high-ranking officials in the U.S. Department of Labor supported them (Aders 1976). Migrant Legal Action Programs, Inc., a legal services organization in Washington, D.C., went to court on behalf of the Puerto
Ricans and other domestic workers, arguing that they were being displaced by H-2 workers. Growers insisted that they needed the certification of foreign workers because Puerto Rican workers were not available due to the onerous contract imposed by the government of Puerto Rico. In the case of Galan v. Dunlop (U.S. District Court, District of Columbia, 411 F. Supp. 268, 1975), the court ruled in the growers’ favor. The government of Puerto Rico joined in an appeal of the ruling while it began to negotiate for the 1976 contract (Turner 1976).

During the spring of 1976, the FLEC and the government of Puerto Rico again entered into talks. One of the arguments of the government of Puerto Rico was that its contract was very similar to the British West Indian contract. The two parties reached an agreement by July. The agreement included: the placement of 1000 Puerto Rican contract workers in the 1976 apple harvest; elimination of a clause that required employers to provide three hot meals for workers; the hiring of an adequate number of workers that could be monitored by the government of Puerto Rico; and forgoing by the government of Puerto Rico of any legal challenges against the importation of H-2 workers (Bustelo 1975).

As of September 2, 1976, despite the Puerto Rican government’s attempts to accommodate the growers’ demands, they were not willing to hire Puerto Rican workers and had begun to undermine the Puerto Rican program despite the agreement. The chairman of the Farm Labor Executive Committee indicated to a Migration Division official that “over my dead body there would be any Puerto Rican workers picking apples in Wayne County” (Quiros 1977). The New England Apple Council had not signed the agreement, while growers from New York’s Champlain region had not contacted the Migration Division. A grower refused to accept the workers assigned to his farm, and many others were violating the negotiated memorandum of understanding (Vilches 1976). Other growers in New York resigned from the Farm Labor Executive Committee (Green 1976).

Some farmers hired Puerto Rican workers but began to fire them at any attempt to complain about working and living conditions. In September 1976, a New England apple grower fired a group of Puerto Rican workers at the beginning of the harvest on the grounds that they did not know how to pick apples. Their employer refused to pay for their return tickets. Raymond Pacheco, a 23-year-old worker, understood they would be paid $2.69 hourly, but their employers told them that he would be paid a piece-rate of 35 cents
per bushel. Aurelio Rivera, a migrant worker for six years, thought they would receive three meals a day. Instead, the grower gave workers money to buy and cook their own food. The money was only enough to buy milk, cheese, bread, and hamburger meat. When these workers went to talk to the employer they were asked to go back to work. Because they insisted on discussing the problem, the employer fired them for breaking the contract (Kirchheimer 1976). Lionel de Jesus, an official from the Migration Division, stated:

> Basically, we feel this problem goes back awhile. In the past the growers brought Jamaicans up to pick the apple crop and they were very much at the whim of the growers. They were told to work under difficult conditions—I hate to say this—but, like slave labor. (Kirchheimer 1976)

Puerto Ricans would not put up with the wages or the living and working conditions because they knew their rights with the contract and the protections of U.S. citizenship. An unfair practice of some growers was to send domestic workers where harvesting and wages were the lowest, setting aside the best crops to be harvested by H-2 workers. Growers also provided H-2 workers with better housing and meals. By providing Jamaican-style meals prepared by hired Jamaican cooks, growers ensured that guestworkers would be happy while domestic workers were not. In this way, apple growers argued that their productivity was low and that they could not do quality work (Associated Press 1983). After almost thirty years of the Puerto Rico Farm Labor Program, however, the Puerto Ricans hired for the apple harvest were knowledgeable about migration and ready to challenge employers.

The Puerto Rican workers were stranded in Boston after arriving from Maine without money and unable to communicate in English. Their employer had put them on a bus with instructions to visit the government of Puerto Rico’s Migration Division Offices. The offices were closed at the time of their arrival, leaving the workers without money or a place to stay (Kirchheimer 1976). The Puerto Rican community mobilized with some workers occupying the offices until the Migration Division agreed to pay their transportation back to Puerto Rico. Other workers found jobs or went to live with relatives in Hartford and New York City (Aldarondo 1976).

Although lack of experience was another factor that growers used against hiring Puerto Ricans, Legal Services in the Northeast and Puerto Rico filed class action lawsuits against the growers with domestic workers who had more
than two years of experience picking apples. Growers had denied jobs to these workers. In addition, Puerto Rican workers were not new in apple picking. Since the 1950s, Puerto Rican workers had been hired in the apple harvest. By the early 1970s, growers not grouped in associations were using Puerto Rican workers with no problems (Editorial 1952; Atwood 1954, 14). Growers also hired Puerto Rican workers as peach pickers.

An apple farmer stated that, “Puerto Ricans aren’t able to do apple-picking work… They are physically too small to do this work,… The men are used to more low-level work, such as picking berries.”

Another argument against Puerto Rican workers expressed by growers was racial. Growers argued that the size of Puerto Rican workers was inappropriate for the picking of the apples. An apple farmer stated that, “Puerto Ricans aren’t able to do apple-picking work… They are physically too small to do this work,… The men are used to more low-level work, such as picking berries” (Kirchheimer 1976). Tall Jamaican workers were preferred by apple growers, who held the perception of Puerto Ricans as being physically suited for harvesting vegetables and berries (Associated Press 1978, 5; Associated Press 1983).

Picking apples involves workers standing on a ladder, bracing with their legs, using both hands to pick apples carefully one at a time, without causing bruises, and placing them in buckets held by the workers using a strap around their necks or shoulders (Kirchheimer 1976). Apple picking is paid by the piece-rate, which is a bushel. And a bushel is 40 to 48 pounds or around 126 medium apples. Workers usually spend 8–10 hours picking around 100 bushels. Growers argued that Puerto Rican workers were not producing enough and that they refused to work. However, a Migration Division investigation concluded that workers’ performance had been evaluated before the 60 hours of training required by the contract. Some workers left voluntarily because they complained about large deductions from their paychecks. Other workers said that they were willing to work but that growers pushed them out (Wagenheim 1976).

Hiring domestic workers like Puerto Ricans meant more complications and less profit for growers, who had to contribute to Social Security and
withhold income taxes (Associated Press 1978, 5; Associated Press 1983). The result of hiring H-2 workers was that agricultural wages were lower in the areas where growers employed them. In 1980, 11 of the states that used H-2 workers ranked in the bottom 15 states with the lowest agricultural wages. Growers who did not use H-2 workers paid more to their workers. Historically, the Bracero Program and the H-2 Program had a negative impact on wages and working conditions of domestic farmworkers (Associated Press 1983; Levine 2009, 3–6; Semler 1983, 213).

In 1977, Legal Services filed a class-action suit on behalf of the workers against the government of Puerto Rico, the U.S. Department of Labor, and the apple growers in response to the firing of Puerto Rican workers during the apple harvest of 1976. This case was known as Hernandez Flecha et al. v. Quiros (U.S. Court of Appeals, First Circuit, 567 F. 2d 1154, 1977). It went to the First Circuit, which established that Puerto Ricans were not available if they

Figure 6. Puerto Rican farmworker in an onion field of a muck farm in Oswego County, New York. Photo by author, June 2013.
did not accept the wages offered in the job orders. It also ruled that benefits provided to H-2 workers must be given to domestic workers, but that growers did not have to offer better benefits as requested by workers. In practice, the court’s decision established that the U.S. government, the sending nations of H-2 workers, and the growers could decide the conditions in which domestic workers were employed, and neither domestic workers nor the government of Puerto Rico could challenge such conditions (Semler 1983, 215).

In 1978, the government of Puerto Rico accepted the minimum level of benefits set by the U.S. Department of Labor, waiving the use of its contract and benefits. The U.S. Department of Labor assisted with the hiring of 992 workers from Puerto Rico paying $275,000 for transportation, housing, and meals. Although many growers gave an opportunity to workers, the same situation arose with many workers being quickly dismissed or given poor opportunities that led them to leave their jobs voluntarily. Fifteen days after the beginning of the harvest only ninety-seven Puerto Rican workers were still
working in the harvest. By firing the other workers before they completed 50 percent of work for the harvest, growers avoided the responsibility of paying for transportation and subsistence costs. Fearing that the same incidents would happen again, the government of Puerto Rico refused to waive the contract requirement for the 1979 apple harvest, and therefore no Puerto Ricans were hired for the apple harvest that year. In the 1980s, the government of Puerto Rico made new attempts to place Puerto Ricans in the apple harvest, failing again. The apple growers succeeded in maintaining their preference for H-2 workers (Semler 1983, 218–9, 227).

The decisive legal battles over farm labor were fought in the district courts, where growers found it easier to persuade judges (Griffith 1993, 211). Eastern apple growers using H-2 workers were able to control and manipulate the Department of Labor’s mechanism of recruitment and deployment of labor using the excuse of labor shortages, inexperience, and the onerous burden of hiring Puerto Rican and other domestic workers. By 1990s, Mexican and Central American workers began to replace Puerto Rican farmworkers in the Northeast of the United States. In 1993, the government of Puerto Rico also eliminated the Department of Community Affairs in the United States, the successor of the Migration Division, thus ending Puerto Rico’s Farm Labor Program after 45 years. The Glassboro Service Association in southern New Jersey, the largest employer of Puerto Rican workers throughout the history of the Farm Labor Program, replaced Puerto Rican workers with Mexican workers.

CONCLUSION

The case of Puerto Rican farm labor shows that U.S. agriculture has developed a labor regime in which the perfect worker for farmers and large agribusinesses is either a guestworker or an undocumented immigrant. A migrant who is supposedly docile but who is disposable and replaceable, and can be deported easily (Hahamovitch 2003). Puerto Rican migrant farm labor is cheap, but imperfect for employers. Workers return back to their homes after the harvest. In contrast to undocumented workers, U.S. citizenship provides Puerto Ricans with rights to access services and be able to stay in the surrounding communities (Griffith 1993, 43). Although Puerto Rican farmworkers do not have to fear deportation, they are at a disadvantage in regard to keeping and finding farm jobs because of employers’ preference for guestworkers, a more vulnerable labor force in all aspects.
Labor forces are constructed in part by elaborating myths about the quality of work and productivity of one ethnicity against others (Griffith 1993, 7). The firing of Puerto Rican workers by apple growers shows that labor shortages in U.S. agriculture depend on growers’ needs for disposable workers. Growers searched for any legal maneuver possible to get rid of Puerto Rican workers. By elaborating a myth that Puerto Rican workers were not happy workers and were less productive without a work ethic, farmers tried to justify their attempt to keep them out of the apple picking labor force, and hence, lower labor costs. Employers usually perceive domestic workers as more likely to talk back and assert their rights than immigrants because of their citizenship status. Thus, the experience of Puerto Rican farmworkers is similar to the experience of African Americans and Chicanos (Waldinger and Lichter 2003, 151-153, 161, 165).

The Migration Division sought to manage the flow of migrant farm workers, but U.S. citizenship allowed Puerto Rican workers to migrate freely.

U.S. agencies and departments allowed the government of Puerto Rico to become part of federal programs and extend its reach to the rural United States. The Migration Division sought to manage the flow of migrant farm workers, but U.S. citizenship allowed Puerto Rican workers to migrate freely. Thus, one cannot explain fully how citizenship, race, and immigration policies shaped Puerto Rican farm labor migration without understanding the intricacies of U.S. colonialism. Because of the colonial relationship, Puerto Rico’s government officials were able to insert themselves within the structures of federal government and place the Puerto Rico Farm Labor Program within the implementation of the Wagner-Peyser Act and the Immigration and Nationality Act.

All these developments in the Puerto Rico Farm Labor Program resulted in its eventual demise. The litigation against apple growers crippled the standing of the government of Puerto Rico before growers and the United States Department of Labor. The fact that Puerto Rican workers would not be preferred over H-2 workers meant that the most important pillar of the program had been dismantled by the courts in the 1970s. Puerto Ricans were imperfect migrant workers for apple growers’ associations because their
citizenship provided them with rights, access to services, and the ability to stay in the surrounding communities.

Finally, the experience of Puerto Rican farmworkers calls into question preconceived notions of clear-cut discourses of deportability and citizenship. Puerto Rican migrants, as distinctive U.S. citizens and colonial subjects, show the particular place that colonial population occupy between minority populations (African Americans and Chicanos) and immigrants within modern agrarian labor regimes and immigration policies.

NOTES
1 The Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1952 established the H-2 visa program formalizing guestwork within U.S. immigration law. Farmers recruited West Indian farmworkers through the H-2 visa program. In 1986, the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 replaced the H-2 visa program with the H-2A visa program specifically providing temporary legal status to guestworkers in agriculture (see Griffith 2007).
2 The Puerto Rican Farm Labor Program also needs to be understood in the context of the Wagner-Peyser Act. On June 6, 1933, this Act created the U.S. Employment Service, an interstate exchange system with affiliated state offices assisting job-seekers and employers (Fay and Lippoldt 1999, 31; Ruttenberg and Gutchess 1970, 4–5). The government of Puerto Rico created the Puerto Rico Bureau of Employment and Migration to function as one of the state offices. Like the U.S. Employment Service, the Puerto Rico Bureau sought to identify industries and geographical regions with labor shortages and surpluses in order to plan to transport and provide an efficient use of the labor force (O’Leary and Eberts 2008, 1–4; USES 1949, 4).
3 In the U.S. Northern region, the apple harvest begins around Labor Day and ends in October. It usually lasts six to eight weeks, which requires having a labor force available and willing to work during a short period of time. Skill and experience are valuable. In the 1970s, the labor force in the apple harvest was a combination of domestic workers and Jamaican immigrant workers. The domestic apple pickers were mostly Southern African Americans and some Puerto Ricans who worked in the citrus fruit industry during the winter and drove north in the summer, harvesting vegetables in New Jersey and Maryland. Other Puerto Ricans probably migrated directly from the islands. From September to October they spent their time picking apples (Associated Press 1978; Cowan 1978, 40–45).

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Appendix I: Workers Placed in U.S. Farms by Puerto Rico’s Migrant Farm Labor Program, 1947-1992

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