

# Teacher Formation and the Epistemic Suppression of Borinquen<sup>1</sup>

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## PROLOGUE

I begin this essay with a brief story of its origins in order to situate my reader — the realization that I had passed through all of my formal schooling without ever encountering philosophers of education from Puerto Rico. How had I not imagined the possibility of their existence? How had this happened? My familial education had exposed me to the figures of Pedro Albizu Campos, Eugenio Maria Hostos, Antonio Corretjer, Julia de Burgos, and Ramón Emeterio Betances. But, as I realize now, I never understood them as *philosophers* that could bring to bear important pedagogical ideas in education because they were not part of the curriculum in the elite universities I had attended, because knowledge emanated from geographies decidedly untropical in character. My epistemic suppression was so profound that it was not until after my formal studies ended that the lacuna of philosophies of education from Puerto Rico fully revealed itself. This question led me to investigate why I had not adequately imagined philosophies of education from Puerto Rico (and the Caribbean). This investigation has led me to unexpected places: one of which is the advent of teacher education in the United States and its role in the colonization of Borinquen.

I argue that Marvin Grove Brumbaugh, the first commissioner of education to Puerto Rico, created a colonial education system based upon ideal theories of pedagogy that undergirded the development of teacher education in the United States. I argue that this approach contributed to an imaginative colonizing through the replacement of local and contextual artifacts of instruction with symbols and patterns of knowing that were foreign and imported. Thus, what was local, contextual, or autochthonous was suppressed and, as I will show, rendered unimaginable.

The purpose of examining this historical moment is to engage us in what Linda Martin Alcoff describes as a “reflexive check.”<sup>2</sup> Alcoff articulates this conceptual exercise, becoming aware of constitutive conditions of knowledge, as characteristic of Latin American philosophy but as an activity that Eurocentric philosophy has seen as largely unnecessary. In short, such a “check” marks and locates events or context that gave or give shape to the epistemological frameworks that circumscribe the activity of philosophy and education in North America. It is, Alcoff writes, “an aware assessment of the constitutive conditions which one’s knowledge occurs.”<sup>3</sup> An examination of this historical moment highlights an aspect of the context of teacher education and the philosophies that govern it in North America — namely, the legacy and present challenge to our field of the relationship between epistemic suppression and idealized or decontextual approaches to teacher formation. It offers, through the case of Puerto Rican education at the turn of the century, an example of that serves to show why the philosophical education of teachers in the United States may benefit from, as Anibal Quijano argues,<sup>4</sup> a fundamental epistemological reconstitution.

Finally, I offer a brief glimpse into the work of Ramón Emeterio Betances, whose use of situated stories of Antillean “greats” may contribute to our understanding of how this epistemological reconstitution may occur.

#### EPISTEMIC SUPPRESSION

There was a need to counteract decades of harmful influences, which at times were openly contradictory to our cultural values, with an effort to promote these values. There was an urgent need to struggle against a psychological conditioning which had become deeply rooted in our colonial society and which led many Puerto Ricans to systematically diminish anything autochthonous, while disproportionately valuing everything that was foreign, or that seemed foreign.<sup>5</sup>

Puerto Rico is known by most North Americans as one of the last remaining colonies on the planet and a nice place to take a vacation. It is, like most of the Caribbean, a playground for tourists seeking warm weather escapes. It has, in popular knowledge, no real significant history or culture to offer to global intellectual superpowers beyond Jennifer Lopez (whom most people think is Mexican because she played Selena in a movie). Many Americans don't even realize that Puerto Ricans are citizens, albeit in a malformed colonialist sense. This ignorance about what and how Puerto Rico is, this epistemic failure of the imagination to envision a world with a powerfully rich intellectual history is nothing less than a kind of violence. This epistemic violence began in 1493 when Christopher Columbus collided with Borinquen and the Taíno people and still endures today. While the history of Spain and its colonization project is crucial and a related part of this story, this essay will only examine how the invasion of Puerto Rico by the United States on July 25, 1898, contributed to the lacuna of philosophies of education from Puerto Rico that exists in the majority of education programs in the United States today. To understand how this occurred is to appreciate that, from the moment the United States invaded Puerto Rico, the Insular Commission (a group of men sent to evaluate the conditions on the island) determined that education, particularly the formation of teachers, would be key to the success of the occupation. Quijano defines the “colonization of the imagination of the dominated” as the repression of the colonized over “the modes of knowing, of producing knowledge, of producing perspectives, images, systems of images, symbols, modes of signification, over the resources, patterns and instruments of formalized and objectivised expression, intellectual or visual. It was followed by the imposition of the use of the rulers own patterns of expression.”<sup>6</sup>

For the purposes of this essay, education, specifically schooling and teacher formation, is understood as a mechanism that shapes knowing, as a way that a society learns to produce knowledge and perspectives. Cultural production by the dominated is blocked by suppressing (systematically) ways of knowing that might give rise to vernaculars distinct from that of the colonizing power. The ability to imagine through cultural modes once familiar is made alien through their replacement with symbols, patterns of expression and knowledge of the colonizers. School and teachers were familiar to Puerto Ricans at the time of the U.S. invasion. However, this system was made alien through the imposition of symbols, language, and bodies that were distinctly non-Puerto Rican. Epistemologies significant to the dominated culture are demeaned and suppressed. The colonization of the imagination is but

one tool in the arsenal of the colonial matrix of power, the key domains of which are control of economy; control of authority; control of gender and sexuality; and, control of subjectivity and knowledge.<sup>7</sup> This essay focuses its attention on how the institution of Americanized public schooling in Puerto Rico was a mechanism to control subjectivity and knowledge through suppressing knowledge of the contextual and replacing it with imaginative material for the purpose of valuing the intellectual material of the United States. Key to this colonization at the turn of the century, I posit, was the presentation of knowledge (intellectual ideas, art, history) as existing beyond the shores of *La Isla del Encanto* on the U.S. mainland through, in particular, importing the English-speaking white-Anglo teacher. In other words, it buried what Alegría describes as autochthonous knowledge,<sup>8</sup> deep beneath the shiny lie that the way to freedom was through participation in the narrow patriotism presented as curriculum. American educational philosophies at the turn of the twentieth century and powerful figures in the nascent field of pedagogical studies and Normal Schools were central to this approach. I will now turn to an examination of how one prominent educational philosopher of the early twentieth century, M.G. Brumbaugh, utilized idealized philosophies of democratic education to shape educational propaganda predicated on assimilation and epistemic suppression. I aim to understand, through this historical moment, how the roots of my own epistemic suppression regarding the possibilities of philosophies of education from Puerto Rico may have arisen.

#### M.G. BRUMBAUGH

Two years after the 1898 invasion of Puerto Rico by the United States, the first commissioner of education to the island, Brumbaugh wrote, “The schools were regarded as institutions imposed upon the people for reasons not to them apparent. It was vastly more important in this crisis to create popular sentiment than to discuss methods of teaching. The great fundamentals of an educational propaganda were needed.”<sup>9</sup> Brumbaugh,<sup>10</sup> a formidable figure in education and philosophy during his time, immediately recognized, with help from the U.S. military, that the population of Puerto Rico needed to be convinced of the value of the new schools and that the formation of the teacher was well situated to implement the fundamentals of this propaganda campaign. This statement is one of the first articulations of how teacher “education” became a method for colonizing the imagination and laid the foundation for Puerto Rican education from that moment forward. The Brumbaugh philosophy of schooling as patriotic indoctrination persisted in Puerto Rico throughout the twentieth century.

Brumbaugh was well qualified for the job of Commissioner of a newly acquired colony. Prior to his appointment to Puerto Rico, Brumbaugh was the first professor appointed as chairman of Pedagogy in the Philosophy department at the University of Pennsylvania. Before his stint in Puerto Rico, Brumbaugh was already a well-respected educator and scholar who had begun his career teaching at sixteen years old in a rural Pennsylvania school. He went on to receive a doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania in Literature, doing the first American dissertation on the poet John Donne. Brumbaugh, as did many of his contemporaries and predecessors who shaped the Normal Schools and American public education, received an excellent education

in Eurocentricism, the ideals of which influenced the philosophies that shaped the colonial education system of Puerto Rico. Like most white men attending American universities at the time, he did not study the intellectual culture and history of the Americas, the Middle East, Africa or Asia. He did not speak nor attempt to learn Spanish. His educational experience did not include such perspectives. More than likely, he could not perceive the depth of his epistemic blindness to the intellectual culture that had existed prior to the arrival of the United States. This epistemic injustice contributed to effectively blotting out the systems of education, epistemologies, Normal schools, and intellectual and cultural accomplishments that had developed on Borinquen over the course of its history.<sup>11</sup> His life as an academic and public figure give insight into the educational beliefs that shaped his approach.

Just prior to leaving for Puerto Rico, personally asked by President McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt, he published the *Readers*, a five-volume series intended for use in literacy instruction. These *Readers* offer a glimpse of the educational values Brumbaugh believed in and why, more than likely, the United States Military and President McKinley saw him as well suited to the position of Americanizing Puerto Ricans through systematized schooling. Brumbaugh believed that patriotism was the one virtue that American schools should teach every child.<sup>12</sup> He writes in the preface to the *Fifth Reader*, “Among the many virtues made prominent in the selections here given none is more fully, more carefully, more eloquently set forth than love of country. Ample material is given to inculcate love of our history and through it, love of our country.”<sup>13</sup> Teaching patriotism was the primary aim of schools for Brumbaugh. Like other progressives of his time influenced by Horace Mann, Brumbaugh held an unshakable belief in the role of the common free school in educating for participation in a democracy. His belief that patriotism and democracy were synonymous is a much longer philosophical discussion than cannot be taken up within the constraints of this essay. The school was the mechanism that supplied the common fund of knowledge necessary for a healthy republic and, for Brumbaugh, this boiled down to the English language, an American Protestant work ethic, and knowledge of the history and geography of the United States. In an address before the American Education Association in 1908, he said,

This prop beneath the Republic, this universal factory whose output is to make an advanced democracy is, for obvious reasons, the free public school. Hence our democracy depends upon the possession by all its individual participants of a fund of common knowledge, which fund is the currency of democracy; and the function of the public school is to impart such a fund of common knowledge to all that participate in our democracy as to make facile the interchange of ideas and reciprocal regard of each for the other. The initiation into democracy should always be contingent upon the possession of this common knowledge. For that reason the stranger from without should serve an apprenticeship in the American Public School before he is invested with the toga of American citizenship.<sup>14</sup>

Brumbaugh trained the teachers of Puerto Rico to reflect this philosophy, that the public school was the doorway through which the newly acquired “strangers” to the United States learned the common fund of knowledge essential to democratic participation; they would not be granted citizenship without this participation. This philosophical approach, while espousing ideal egalitarian philosophies, served, in

practice, to be the rationale for suppressing the cultural and intellectual history of the island; what had existed before was not productive material for the development of the American patriotic imagination; it was not considered part of the “fund of common knowledge.” We can extrapolate quite easily, I believe, from this conceptual framework to the curriculum of teacher education; what is included is included because we believe it to be part of the fund of common knowledge essential to becoming a teacher. Brumbaugh’s imperialist approach to democratic education placed great value on the teacher as primary shaper of the patriotic imagination.

Virtually none of the Puerto Rican teachers already working on the island were hired. Most were fired and many were deported to Spain.<sup>15</sup> The teachers recruited from the mainland were white Anglo-Americans who spoke no Spanish. They were deployed across the island, trained, through the summer institutes Brumbaugh established and the Normal School, to focus their energies on socializing Puerto Ricans into American values and ideals. Brumbaugh believed deeply in the value of teachers as a way to socialize children. He states,

Beyond all courses of study, and more important than any part or parts of the same, is the power of teaching, and the life of a noble teacher, impressing upon children from day to day the simple impressions of Christian manliness and womanliness, earnest devotion to country and home, and that series of civic, moral and social virtues which in the aggregate make up a noble character. The end of all true teaching is right living.<sup>16</sup>

Right living, in the case of Puerto Rico, was assimilation into the history, culture, and language of the United States, imbued with a missionary zeal. It was to learn, through one’s teacher, that the history, culture, and language of Puerto Rico were now unimportant. This strategy was fundamental in the epistemic suppression campaign — to form teachers who did not speak the language, who knew nothing of the island, and who were trained to teach United States history, English, and patriotic songs in order to suppress the notion that an intellectual and cultural identity had existed prior to the United States. Brumbaugh was particularly fond of the instruction in patriotic songs, such as the Pledge of Allegiance and Yankee Doodle, in the schools across the island. He wrote in the 1901 annual report to the Department of the Interior about his observations of the schools, “The marvel is that they sing in English. The first English many of them know is the English of our national songs. The influence of this is far-reaching.”<sup>17</sup> Children and teachers spent a good deal of school time learning to sing these songs in preparation for the visits of the American officials. It was a centerpiece of the curriculum. In addition, the questions on the teacher examinations designed to assess the knowledge that would be taught in the schools required teachers to know more about the United States than Puerto Rico. Primary source documents, reports written by Brumbaugh and his predecessors, show teacher exams with virtually no questions regarding Puerto Rican intellectual, artistic, and political history. Important to the project of colonizing the imagination, the “examinations provided the United States with an academic mystique that was denied to Puerto Rico.”<sup>18</sup> Teachers embodied the assimilationist educational system, imbued with the songs, perspectives, language, and morals that would, through the denial of their own, provide the people of Puerto Rico with the material to shape imaginings constructed from imperialist ideas.

Mystifying the dominant forms of knowledge is, Quijano tells us, central to how colonization of the imagination occurs.<sup>19</sup> Privileging the United States in the curriculum inculcated teachers with the belief that it was superior to Puerto Rico and effectively erased any need to study or know about what had existed on the Island prior to their arrival. Privileging the United States through the curriculum instructed in the notion that knowledge was something foreign, imported and alien; rather than what was local, national or internal. Through the Brumbaughian curriculum, teachers became the heavy curtain that was pulled across the history of what Puerto Rico had been before the United States. They effectively suppressed situated, intimate, and local epistemologies, thus limiting the material for imagining Borinquen as possessing an epistemic existence apart from the United States; Puerto Rico, from the approach of teacher formation, did not exist without the United States.

#### INTERLUDE

As I mentioned at the start of this essay, this text is not intended to be a philosophical argument in the classical sense but rather a “check” into how, in my own education, the lacuna of philosophies of education from Puerto Rico may have arisen. The figure of Brumbaugh, a preeminent pedagogue at the turn of the century and a foundational figure in the development of teacher education in the United States, reveals the role teacher education played in the epistemic suppression of Borinquen. Because this essay is intended as a preliminary utterance of this topic, the relationship of the Carlisle Indian Industrial School<sup>20</sup> and the subsequent involvement of figures such as Samuel Lindsay, Dr. James Earle Russell, Booker T. Washington, and a number of other educational luminaries who contributed to the creation of teacher education in the United States cannot be undertaken here. What this reflexive check reveals is that within our own foundations lies a history of epistemic suppression shaped, knowingly or unknowingly, through the implementation of educational philosophies inattentive to the significance of context.

The suppression of philosophies of education from Puerto Rico, I have come to understand, is directly related to the formation of teachers as vessels of imperialist transmissions whose Americanized curriculum imbued knowledge with foreign, extrinsic, and alien qualities. It is why, I am beginning to suspect, the possibility of philosophies of education from Puerto Rico were obscured for me; I had learned to look away from Borinquen and the Caribbean for epistemic authority, to believe that what existed there were merely copies of European thoughts adorned with tropical embellishment. The Puerto Rican education system was shaped, after 1898, with an almost cyclopean focus on the United States and the possibility of looking toward the self, toward the local, historical, the intimate, the indigenous, for theories of education was a chimera.

“ESTA SITUACIÓN ME LLENA DE INQUIETUD.”

What I will offer at this point is a fragment, an imaginative beginning to a larger project of epistemic reconstitution. Teacher formation, as I have aimed to show, is deeply impacted by philosophical ideas. It can, if too disconnected from context, exert epistemic harm. What then does teacher formation become when more attentive to context? Can it free itself from such a history of epistemic suppression?

Have we? Is it as simple as adding a text from Puerto Rico into teacher education curriculums? As I attempt to pull back the heavy curtain that was drawn across the intellectual and cultural existence of Borinquen, what material might be found for imagining Puerto Rican philosophies of education? There are, when one begins to dig, a complex network of ideas, figures, and events of profound and revolutionary educational activity flowing throughout the history of the Caribbean particularly in the years between the early 1800s and mid-1930s. Figures, such as Eugenio María Hostos and Arturo Schomburg, are fairly well known in some circles; but Consuelo Serra, José Antonio Aponte and Salomé Urena are virtually unknown. Ramón Emeterio Betances is, while not remembered as a pedagogue as Hostos is, gives us, I posit, a significant grounding for how to begin to imagine philosophies of education from Puerto Rico that may be beneficial to teacher formation and the amelioration of lacunas created by the legacy of colonialism, slavery and epistemic suppression.

Antonio Martorell, an eminent contemporary artist from Puerto Rico, writes of Ramón Emeterio Betances,

How do you imagine what you don't know? A name, a face, a date, a place, an absence of something that was never there to begin with. Growing up in Puerto Rico in the 1940s was not growing up Puerto Rican. By then the American Dream was in our DNA before the DNA was known as such. We didn't dream it, it dreamt us. We were born in Puerto Rico, but we were taught that everything Puerto Rican was small, poor, weak and ignorant. And ignorant we were about ourselves, not about the idealized image of the American we were destined and privileged to become. Over there, we have never considered ourselves a minority because we are not, and being a majority we take for granted what has not been granted, what has, quite the contrary, been systematically taken away.<sup>21</sup>

Martorell goes on to describe how, through following his own path of study, he awakened to Betances; to imagine him was to epistemically reconstitute himself through learning the intellectual and cultural existence of Puerto Rico prior to the United States. The work and memory of Betances, likely because of his revolutionary activity and thirty-year exile, suffered greatly under the epistemic suppression wrought by the assimilationist U.S. education system. Carlos Rama, the Uruguayan writer who wrote the prologue to a collection of Betances's writings, letters, and speeches said, "Why isn't Ramón Emeterio Betances studied in literature courses on Puerto Rico? Not even is he found in the treatises or history textbooks on local literature."<sup>22</sup> But, primarily due to the work of Ricardo Alegría, Felix Ojeda Reyes and Paul Estrada, his intellectual work has not vanished.

The life and work of Betances, virtually unknown in the United States, provides, I posit, material for imagining an affective pedagogy rooted in "critically situated stories and knowledge,"<sup>23</sup> or what is intimate, local, and autochthonous. While there is much in Betances's work that I believe may support this claim, I will, given the constraints of this essay, examine one brief example. Central to Betances work was the act of telling the stories, through oratory, pamphlets, and public posters, of the lives and ideas of the Antillean intellectual and revolutionary figures of the time. He translated Wendell Phillips's account of T'oussaint L'Ouverture and wrote an account of Alexandré Petitón, the Haitian revolutionary general and president. With

these works he attempts to show Haiti and its “great men” as embodying the ideal of Antillean revolution, the first revolutionary act to show that even in countries founded upon slavery, freedom was possible. In translating and communicating the lives of these two individuals, Betances seeks to provide Antilleans with, I posit, material for epistemic reconstitution; in other words, the people of the Antilles, Puerto Rico in particular, could imagine their lives through the lives and ideals of their own “greats” in contrast to the “greats” of Europe and the United States. The subsequent production of knowledge could be liberated through knowledge of subjectivities free from the coloniality of power and examples of how this had been accomplished.

When thinking about teacher formation in relation to this brief conceptual framework I have sketched, we may, I believe, begin to imagine where we might turn for epistemic reconstitution. The pursuit of the lacuna, of the unknown and silenced, is where we must turn to decolonize the educational imagination. It is to begin to make space for philosophies of education that, as Alcoff argues, are wide awake to the constitutive conditions of the ideals that have held the formation of teachers, of schools, and of the collective imagination of education. The importance of, as Martorell says, imagining what was unimaginable, rests with discovering critically situated philosophies and people that may provide epistemological frameworks for decolonizing the educational imagination in the United States. It is, for me, deeply instructive that Betances, although exiled in France for close to thirty years, did not seek to translate the work of, for example, Jean-Jacques Rousseau to give philosophical inspiration to the revolutionary chatter flowing through Puerto Rico and the Caribbean but rather chose *Antilleans*. We must ask ourselves, as perhaps Betances did, if we in the United States continue to lean on the very same philosophies and methods that shaped individuals such as Brumbaugh, namely decontextualized and idealized ones from the five countries largely responsible for colonialism and slavery, is it possible to truly decolonize educational imagination in the United States? Perhaps. But, for this philosopher of education, imagining Betances and the Caribbean educational world of that time has been the most profound mechanism for my own decolonization and best hope for more liberated thought on what, in the United States, education may become.

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1. Borinquen, or also Bor'iken, is the indigenous name for Puerto Rico, given by the Taíno people. Puerto Rico has undergone several evolutions in naming. It was named, “San Juan Bautista” by Christopher Columbus and transitioned to “Porto Rico” over time as this was the name for the main port.

2. Linda Martin Alcoff, “Educating with a (De)colonial Consciousness,” *Lapiz*, no. 1 (2014): 80.

3. *Ibid.*, 92.

4. Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism and Latin America.” *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 533–580.

5. Ricardo E. Alegría, *El Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña 1955-1973: 18 años contribuyendo a fortalecer nuestra conciencia nacional*. (San Juan, PR: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1978), 1.

6. Anibal Quijano, “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality.” *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (March/May 2007): 169.

7. Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism and Latin America.”



8. Alegría, *El Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña 1955-1973*.

9. Puerto Rico Department of Education, "Report of the Commissioner of Education for Porto Rico," *Washington Government Print Office*, digitized by University of Michigan, 2005, accessed July 10, 2014. <http://www.archive.org/details/act0826.1901.001.umich.edu>.

10. While I will not examine Brumbaugh's life and his actions as commissioner in depth, the work of José-Manuel Navarro and Earl C. Kaylor are excellent resources. At the time of this appointment, M.G. Brumbaugh, a wunderkind of pedagogy at the turn of the century, was an exceptional public figure in the developing environment of teacher education and compulsory schooling. He was sought after and recruited for the position by President McKinley on the advisement of Theodore Roosevelt.

11. José-Manuel Navarro, *Creating Tropical Yankees: Social Science Textbooks and U.S. Ideological Control in Puerto Rico, 1898–1908* (New York: Routledge Press, 2010), 3–31. José-Manuel Navarro gives an in-depth account of Puerto Rico's educational history under the Spanish from 1493–1898. At the time of the invasion, Puerto Rico had 240 schools, two Normal Schools to train male and female teachers, ongoing attempts to establish a university, and a partnership exchange with the University of Havana.

12. Earl C. Kaylor, *Martin Grove Brumbaugh: A Pennsylvanian's Odyssey from Sainted Schoolman to Bedeviled World War I Governor, 1862–1930* (New Jersey: Farleigh Dickinson Press, 1995), 55.

13. *Ibid*, 123.

14. José-Manuel Navarro, *Creating Tropical Yankees: Social Science Textbooks and U.S. Ideological Control in Puerto Rico, 1898–1908* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 66.

15. Navarro, 45.

16. *Ibid*, 54.

17. *Ibid*, 62.

18. *Ibid*, 72.

19. Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism and Latin America."

20. See, "Acculturation under Duress: The P.R. experience at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School 1898–1918.

21. Antonio Martorell, "Imagining Betances" (lecture, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, New York, NY, 2004).

22. Libia M. Gonzalez, *Betances y el imaginario nacional en Puerto Rico, 1880-1920*, in *Pasion por la libertad*, eds. Felix Ojeda Reyes and Paul Estrade. (San Juan: Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2000).

23. Jossianna Arroyo, *Writing Secrecy in Caribbean Freemasonry* (New York: Palgrave, 2013), 71.